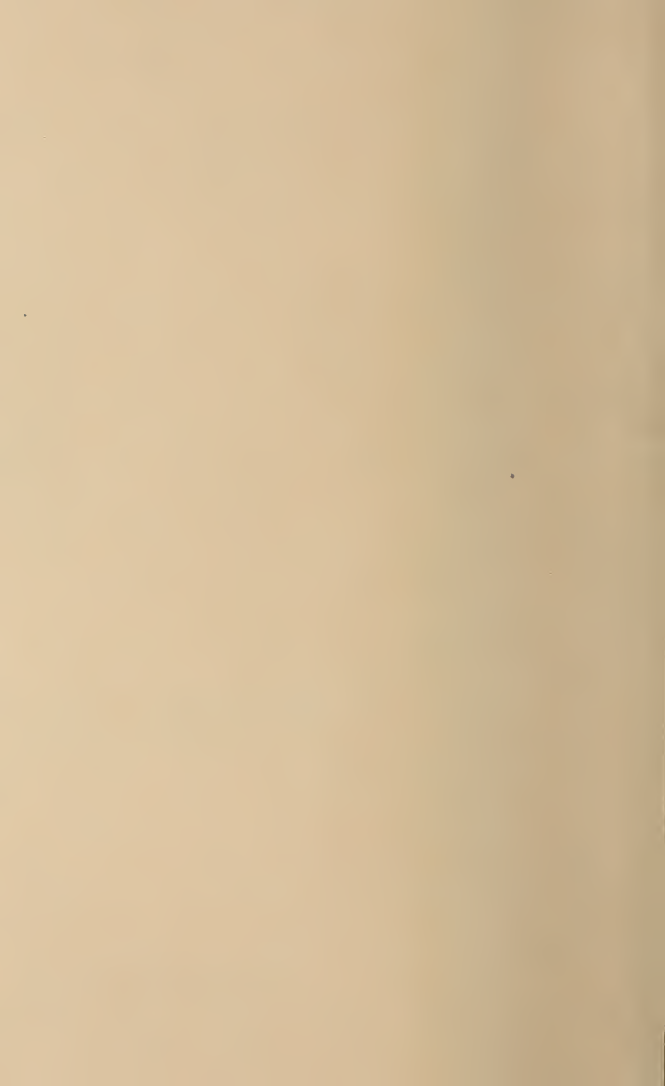


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# HINTS AND HELPS

## FOR MINISTERS.

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# HINTS AND HELPS

For Ministers.

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“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”—ACTS xx. 28.

REVEREND AND DEARLY-BELOVED BRETHREN,

THOUGH some think that Paul's exhortation to these elders doth prove him their ruler, we who are this day to speak to you from the Lord, hope that we may freely do so, without any jealousies of such a conclusion. Though we teach our people, as officers set over them in the Lord, yet may we teach one another, as brethren in office as well as in faith. If the people of our charge must “teach and admonish and exhort each other daily,” no doubt teachers may do it to one another, without

any super-eminence in power or degree. We have the same sins to mortify, and the same graces to be quickened and strengthened, as our people have. We have greater works than they have to do, and greater difficulties to overcome, and therefore we have need to be warned and awakened, if not to be instructed, as well as they. So that I confess I think we should meet together more frequently, if we had nothing else to do but this. And we should deal as plainly and closely with one another, as the most serious among us do with our flocks, lest if they only have sharp admonitions and reproofs, they only should be sound and lively in the faith. That this was Paul's judgment, I need no other proof than this rousing, heart-melting exhortation to the Ephesian elders. A short sermon, but not soon learned! Had the bishops and teachers of the Church but thoroughly learned this short exhortation, though to the neglect of many a volume which hath taken up their time, and helped them to greater applause in the world, how happy had it been for the Church, and for themselves!

In further discoursing on this text, I propose to pursue the following method:—


First, To consider what it is to take heed *to ourselves*.

Secondly, To show *why* we must take heed to ourselves.

Thirdly, To inquire what it is to take heed to *all the flock*.

Fourthly, To illustrate *the manner* in which we must take heed to all the flock.

Fifthly, To state some *motives* why we should take heed to all the flock.



## CHAPTER I

## THE OVERSIGHT OF OURSELVES.



## SECTION I.

*The Nature of this Oversight.*

I. LET us consider, What it is to take heed to ourselves.

1. *See that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought in your own souls.* Take heed to yourselves, brethren, lest you should be destitute of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of that Gospel which you preach; and lest, while you proclaim to the world the necessity of a Saviour, your own hearts should neglect him, and you should miss of an interest in him and his saving benefits. Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing; and lest you famish yourselves while

you prepare food for them. Though there is a promise of shining as the stars to those who turn many to righteousness, (Dan. xii. 3,) that is on supposition that they are first turned to it themselves. Their own sincerity in the faith is the condition of their glory, simply considered, though their great ministerial labours may be a condition of the promise of their greater glory. Many a man hath warned others that they come not to that place of torment, while yet they hastened to it themselves. Many a preacher is now in hell who hath a hundred times called upon his hearers to use the utmost care and diligence to escape it. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refused it themselves; and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglected and abused? Many a tailor goes in rags, that maketh costly clothes for others. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in his Master's work. Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you *be that* which you persuade your hearers to be, and *believe that* which you persuade them to believe; and heartily entertain that Saviour whom you offer to them. He that bade you love your neighbours as your-

selves, did imply that you should love yourselves, and not hate and destroy yourselves and them.\*

It is a fearful thing to be an unsanctified professor, but much more to be *an unsanctified preacher*. Doth it not make you tremble when you open the Bible, lest you should there read the sentence of your own condemnation? When you pen your sermons, little do you think that you are drawing up indictments against your own souls!—when you are arguing against sin, that you are aggravating your own!—when you proclaim to your hearers the unsearchable riches of Christ and

\* We append here the following solemn appeal from the late Bishop of Calcutta's "Introductory Essay" to Collins's edition of Baxter's work, from which these pages are extracted:—

"Examine, we entreat you, your own state of heart. Perhaps you have never felt your sins as an individual penitent, personally accountable to God. Perhaps you have never once wept over them in deep contrition. Perhaps you have never seen the spiritual glory of Christ as the incarnate Saviour, sacrificing himself on the cross for your redemption. Perhaps you have never known what prayer, and meditation, and communion with God, and love to Christ, and hatred of sin, and the denial of self, and the joy of pardon, mean. The consequence is, you have had no care of the souls committed to your charge—you have never taught them their need of salvation—you have never shown them a Redeemer—you have never held out to

his grace, that you are publishing your own iniquity in rejecting them, and your unhappiness in being destitute of them ! What can you do in persuading men to Christ, in drawing them from the world, in urging them to a life of faith and holiness ; but conscience, if it were awake, would tell you that you speak all this to your own confusion ? If you speak of hell, you speak of your own inheritance ; if you describe the joys of heaven, you describe your own misery, seeing you have no right to “ the inheritance of the saints in

them the Holy Spirit, as the Author of life and grace : and how can topics, such as these we have been discussing, be intelligible to you ? Strange would it be if you did not start at them. You are not merely in need of being aroused to greater diligence ; you want to be *quickened from a death in trespasses and sins*. Awake, then, dear friend, to your awful state. *An unconverted minister is dragging all the souls of his people with him to perdition*. He is a blind leader of the blind. He is building up the sinner in his rebellion, his self-righteousness, his negligence. Oh ! repent, then, and turn to God. We speak not to you of a revival of religion amongst others ; we deal with you *for your own salvation*. We plead with you for the sheep, scattered and wandering, and having no shepherd. We adjure you by the vows of your ordination, by the blood of Christ, by the grace of the good Spirit of God, by the value of souls, by the unutterable importance of eternity, to awake and return to God.”



light." What can you say, for the most part, but it will be against your own souls? O miserable life! that a man should study and preach against himself, and spend his days in a course of self-condemning!

A graceless, inexperienced preacher, is one of the most unhappy creatures upon earth; and yet he is ordinarily very insensible of his unhappiness; for he hath so many counterfeits that seem like the gold of saving grace, and so many splendid stones that resemble the Christian's jewels, that he is seldom troubled with the thoughts of his poverty, but thinks he is "rich, and increased in goods, and stands in need of nothing, when he is poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked." He is acquainted with the Holy Scriptures; he is exercised in holy duties; he liveth not in open disgraceful sin; he serveth at God's altar; he reproveth other men's faults, and preacheth up holiness both of heart and life; and how can this man but be holy? Oh! what aggravated misery is this, to perish in the midst of plenty!—to famish with the bread of life in our hands, while we offer it to others, and urge it on them! That those ordinances of God should be the occasion of our delusion, which are instituted to be the means of our conviction and salvation! and that while we hold the looking-glass of the Gospel to others, to show



them the face and aspect of their souls, we should either look on the back part of it ourselves, where we can see nothing, or turn it aside, that it may misrepresent us to ourselves ! If such a wretched man would take my counsel, he would make a stand, and call his heart and life to an account, and fall a preaching a while to himself, before he preach any more to others. He would consider whether food in the mouth, that goeth not into the stomach, will nourish ; whether he that nameth the name of Christ should not depart from iniquity ; whether God will hear his prayers, if he regard iniquity in his heart ; whether it will serve the turn at the day of reckoning to say, “ Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name,” when he shall hear these awful words, “ Depart from me, I know you not ;” and what comfort it will be to Judas when he has gone to his own place, to remember that he preached with the other apostles, or that he sat with Christ, and was called by him, “ Friend.” When such thoughts as these have entered into their souls, and kindly worked awhile upon their consciences, I would advise them to go to their congregation, and preach over Origen’s Sermon on Psalm l. 16, 17—“ *But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest*

*my words behind thee ?”* And when they have read this text, to sit down, and expound and apply it by their tears ; and then to make a full confession of their sin, and lament their case before the whole assembly, and desire their earnest prayers to God for pardoning and renewing grace, that hereafter they may preach a Saviour whom they know, and may feel what they speak, and may commend the riches of the Gospel from their own experience.

Alas ! it is the common danger and calamity of the Church to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, and to have so many men become preachers before they are Christians—who are sanctified by dedication to the altar as priests of God, before they are sanctified by hearty dedication as the disciples of Christ ; and so to worship an *unknown* God, and to preach an *unknown* Christ, to pray through an *unknown* Spirit, to recommend a state of holiness and communion with God, and a glory and a happiness that are *all unknown*, and like to be unknown to them for ever. He is like to be but a heartless preacher, that hath not the Christ and grace that he preacheth in his heart. Oh ! that all our students in our universities would well consider this ! What a poor business is it to themselves, to spend their time in acquiring some little knowledge of the works of God, and of some

of those names which the divided tongues of the nations have imposed on them, and not to know God Himself, nor to be acquainted with that one renewing work that should make them happy! They do but walk in a vain show, and spend their lives like dreaming men, while they busy their wits and tongues about abundance of names and notions, and are strangers to God and the life of saints. If ever God awaken them by His saving grace, they will have cogitations and employments so much more serious than their unsanctified studies, that they will confess they did but dream before. A world of business they make themselves about nothing, while they are wilful strangers to the primitive, independent, necessary Being, who is all in all.

Nothing can be rightly known, if God be not known. We know little of the creature, till we know it as it stands related to the Creator: single letters, and syllables uncomposed, are no better than nonsense. He who overlooketh Him who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, and seeth not Him in all, doth see nothing at all. Your study of physics and other sciences is not worth a rush, if it be not God that you seek after in them. To see and admire, to reverence and adore, to love and delight in God, as exhibited in His works—this is the true and only philosophy ;

the contrary is mere foolery, and is so called again and again by God Himself. This is the sanctification of your studies, when they are devoted to God, and when He is the end, the object, and the life of them all.

And therefore I shall presume to tell you, by the way, that it is a grand error, and of dangerous consequence in Christian academies, (pardon the censure from one so unfit to pass it, seeing the necessity of the case commandeth it,) that they study the creature before the Redeemer, and set themselves to physics, and metaphysics, and mathematics, before they set themselves to theology; whereas no man that hath not the vitals of theology, is capable of going beyond a fool in philosophy. Theology must lay the foundation, and lead the way of all our studies. If God must be searched after, in our search of the creature, then tutors must read God to their pupils in all; and divinity must be the beginning, the middle, the end, the all, of their studies. Our physics and metaphysics must be reduced to theology; and nature must be read as one of God's books, which is purposely written for the revelation of Himself. The Holy Scripture is the easier book; when from it you have first learned God, and His will, as to the most necessary things, address yourselves to the study of His works, and read every creature as

a Christian and a divine. If you see not yourselves and all things as living, and moving, and having being in God, you see nothing, whatever you think you see. If you perceive not, in your study of the creatures, that God is all and in all, and that “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things,” you may think, perhaps, that you “know something, but you know nothing as you ought to know.” Think not so basely of your physics, and of the works of God, as that they are only preparatory studies for boys. It is a most high and noble part of holiness, to search after, behold, admire, and love the great Creator in all His works. How much have the saints of God been employed in this exalted exercise! The book of Job, and the Psalms, may show us that our physics are not so little related to theology as some suppose. I do, therefore, in zeal for the good of the Church, propose it for the consideration of all pious tutors, whether they should not as timely, and as diligently, read to their pupils, or cause them to read, the principal parts of practical divinity, (and there is no other,) as any of the sciences; and whether they should not go together from the very first? It is well that they hear sermons; but that is not enough. If tutors would make it their principal business to acquaint their pupils with the doctrine of salvation, and

labour to set it home upon their hearts, and read to their hearts as well as to their heads, and so carry on the rest of their instructions that it may appear they make them but subservient unto this, this might be a happy means to make a happy Church and a happy country. But when languages and philosophy have almost all their time and diligence, and, instead of reading philosophy like divines, they read divinity like philosophers, as if it were a thing of no more moment than a lesson of music, or arithmetic, and not the doctrine of everlasting life;—this it is that blasteth so many in the bud, and pestereth the Church with unsanctified teachers! Hence it is that we have so many worldings to preach of the invisible felicity, and so many carnal men to declare the mysteries of the Spirit; and when they are taught philosophy before or without religion, what wonder if their philosophy be all or most of their religion!

Again, therefore, I address myself to all who have the charge of the education of youth, especially in order to preparation for the ministry. You, that are schoolmasters and tutors, begin and end with the things of God. Speak daily to the hearts of your scholars those things that must be wrought in their hearts, or else they are undone. Let some piercing words drop frequently from your mouths, of God, and the state of their souls,



and the life to come. Do not say they are too young to understand and receive them. You little know what impressions they may make. Not only the soul of that boy, but many souls may have cause to bless God for your zeal and diligence—yea, for one such seasonable word. You have a great advantage above others to do them good; you have them before they are grown to maturity, and they will hear you when they will not hear another. If they are destined to the ministry, you are preparing them for the special service of God, and must they not first have the knowledge of Him whom they have to serve? Oh! think with yourselves, what a sad thing it will be to their own souls, and what a wrong to the Church of Christ, if they come out from you with common and carnal hearts, to so great, and holy, and spiritual a work! Of a hundred students in one of our colleges, how many may there be that are serious, experienced, godly young men! If you should send one half of them on a work that they are unfit for, what bloody work will they make in the Church or country! Whereas, if you be the means of their conversion and sanctification, how many souls may bless you, and what greater good can you do the Church? When once their hearts are savingly affected with the doctrine which they study and preach, they will study it more heartily, and preach

it more heartily: their own experience will direct them to the fittest subjects, and will furnish them with matter, and quicken them to set it home to the conscience of their hearers. See, therefore, that you make not work for the groans and lamentations of the Church, nor for the great tormentor of the murderers of souls.

II. Content not yourselves with being in a state of grace, but *be careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise*, and that you preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others. If you did this for your own sakes, it would not be lost labour; but I am speaking to you upon the public account, that you would do it for the sake of the Church. When your minds are in a holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruits of it. Your prayers, and praises, and doctrine, will be sweet and heavenly to them. They will likely feel when you have been much with God: that which is most on your hearts, is likely to be most in their ears. I confess I must speak it by lamentable experience, that I publish to my flock the distempers of my own soul. When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold; and when it is confused, my preaching is confused; and so I can often observe also in the best of my hearers, that when I have grown cold in preaching, they



have grown cold too ; and the next prayers which I have heard from them have been too like my preaching. We are the nurses of Christ's little ones. If we forbear taking food ourselves, we shall famish them ; it will soon be visible in their leanness, and dull discharge of their several duties : if we let our love decline, we are not likely to raise theirs ; if we abate our holy care and fear, it will appear in our preaching ; if the matter show it not, the manner will. If we feed on unwholesome food, either errors or fruitless controversies, our hearers are likely to fare the worse for it. Whereas, if we abound in faith, and love, and zeal, how would it overflow to the refreshing of our congregations, and how would it appear in the increase of the same graces in them !

Oh, brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts ; keep out lusts, and passions, and worldly inclinations ; keep up the life of faith, and love, and zeal ; be much at home, and be much with God. If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God—if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers ; or, if you have an affected fervency, you cannot expect a blessing to attend it from on high.

Above all, be much in secret prayer and medi-

tation. Thence you must fetch the heavenly fire that must kindle your sacrifices: remember, you cannot decline and neglect your duty, to your own hurt alone; many will be losers by it as well as you. For your people's sakes, therefore, look to your hearts. If a pang of spiritual pride should overtake you, and you should fall into any dangerous error, and vent your own inventions to draw away disciples after you, what a wound may this prove to the Church, of which you have the oversight! and you may become a plague to them instead of a blessing, and they may wish they had never seen your faces. Oh! therefore, take heed to your own judgments and affections. Vanity and error will slyly insinuate, and seldom come without fair pretences: great distempers and apostacies have usually small beginnings. The prince of darkness doth frequently personate an angel of light, to draw the children of light again into darkness. How easily also will distempers creep in upon our affections, and our first love, and fear, and care abate! Watch, therefore, for the sake of yourselves and others.

But, besides this general course of watchfulness, methinks a minister should take some special pains with his heart, before he is to go to the congregation; if it be then cold, how is he likely to warm the hearts of his hearers? Therefore, go then to

God for life ; read some rousing, awakening book, or meditate on the weight of the subject of which you are to speak, and on the great necessity of your people's souls, that you may go in the zeal of the Lord into His house. Maintain, in this manner, the life of grace in yourselves, that it may appear in all your sermons from the pulpit—that every one who comes cold to the assembly may have some warmth imparted to him before he depart.

III. Take heed to yourselves, *lest your example contradict your doctrine*, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind as may be the occasion of their ruin ; lest you unsay with your lives what you say with your tongues ; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours. It much hindereth our work, when other men are all the week long contradicting to poor people in private what we have been speaking to them from the Word of God in public, because we cannot be at hand to expose their folly ; but it will much more hinder your work, if you contradict yourselves, and if your actions give your tongue the lie, and if you build up an hour or two with your mouths, and all the week after pull down with your hands ! This is the way to make men think that the Word of God is but an idle tale ; and to make preaching seem no better than

prating. He that means as he speaks, will surely do as he speaks. One proud, lordly word—one needless contention—one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing. Tell me, brethren, in the fear of God, do you regard the success of your labours, or do you not? Do you long to see it upon the souls of your hearers? If you do not, what do you preach for; what do you study for; and what do you call yourselves the ministers of Christ for? But if you do, then surely you cannot find in your heart to mar your work for a thing of nought. What! do you regard the success of your labours, and yet will not part with a little to the poor, nor put up with an injury or a foul word, nor stoop to the meanest, nor forbear your passionate or lordly carriage—no, not for the winning of souls, and attaining the end of all your labours! You little value success, that will sell it at so cheap a rate, or will not do so small a matter to attain it.

It is a palpable error of some ministers, who make such a disproportion between their preaching and their living; who study hard to preach exactly, and study little or not at all to live exactly. All the week long is little enough to study how to speak two hours; and yet one hour seems too much to study how to live all the week. They

are loath to misplace a word in their sermons, or to be guilty of any notable infirmity, (and I blame them not, for the matter is holy and weighty,) but they make nothing of misplacing affections, words, and actions, in the course of their lives. Oh! how curiously have I heard some men preach, and how carelessly have I seen them live! They have been so accurate as to the composition of their sermons, that seldom preaching seemed to them a virtue, that their language might be the more polite, and all the rhetorical writers they could meet with, were pressed to serve them for the adorning of their style. And yet, when it came to matter of practice, and they were once out of church, how little did they regard what they said or did, provided it were not so palpably gross as to dishonour them! They that preached precisely would not live precisely! What a difference was there between their pulpit speeches and their familiar discourse! They that were most impatient of barbarisms, solecisms, and paralogisms in a sermon, could easily tolerate them in their life and conversation.

Certainly, brethren, we have very great cause to take heed what we do, as well as what we say. If we will be the servants of Christ indeed, we must not be tongue servants only, but must serve him with our deeds, “and be doers of the work,

that we may be blessed in our deed." As our people must be "doers of the word, and not hearers only;" so we must be doers and not speakers only, lest we "deceive our own selves." A practical doctrine must be practically preached. We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well. We must think and think again how to compose our lives as may most tend to men's salvation, as well as our sermons. When you are studying what to say to your people, if you have any concern for their souls, you will be often thinking with yourself, "How shall I get within them? and what shall I say that is most likely to convince them, and convert them, and promote their salvation?" And should you not as diligently think with yourself, "How shall I live, and what shall I do, and how shall I dispose of all that I have, as may most tend to the saving of men's souls?" Brethren, if the salvation of souls be your end, you will certainly intend it *out of* the pulpit as well as *in* it! If it be your end, you will live for it, and contribute all your endeavours to attain it. You will ask concerning the money in your purse, as well as concerning other means, "In what way shall I lay it out for the greatest good, especially to men's souls?" Oh! that this were your daily study, how to use your wealth, your friends, and all you have for God, as well as



your tongues ! Then should we see that fruit of your labours which is never otherwise likely to be seen. If you intend the end of the ministry, in the pulpit only, it would seem you take yourselves for ministers no longer than you are there. And, if so, I think you are unworthy to be esteemed ministers at all.

Let me entreat you, brethren, to *do* well, as well as *say* well. Be zealous of good works. Maintain your innocency, and walk without offence. Let your lives condemn sin, and persuade men to duty. Would you have your people more careful of their souls than you are of yours ? If you would have them redeem *their* time, do you not mis-spend *yours*. If you would not have them vain in their conference, see that you speak yourselves the things which may edify and tend to minister grace to the hearers. Order your own families well, if you would have them do so by theirs. Be not proud and lordly, if you would have them to be lowly. There are no virtues wherein your example will do more, at least to abate men's prejudice, than humility, and meekness, and self-denial. Forgive injuries, and "be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Remember you are obliged to be the servants of all. "Condescend to men of low estate." Be not strange to the poor of your flock ; they are apt to

take your strangeness for contempt. Familiarity, improved to holy ends, may do abundance of good. Speak not roughly or disrespectfully to any one; but be courteous to the meanest, as to your equal in Christ. A kind and winning carriage is a cheap way of doing men good.

Let me entreat you to abound in works of charity and benevolence. Go to the poor, and see what they want, and show your compassion at once to their soul and body. Buy them a catechism, and other small books that are most likely to do them good, and make them promise to read them with care and attention. Stretch your purse to the utmost, and do all the good you can. Think not of being rich; seek not great things for yourselves or posterity. What if you do impoverish yourselves to do a greater good; will this be loss or gain? If you believe that God is the safest purse-bearer, and that to expend in His service is the greatest usury, show them that you do believe it. I know that flesh and blood will cavil before it will lose its prey, and will never want something to say against this duty; but mark what I say, and the Lord set it home upon your hearts—that man who hath anything in the world so dear to him that he cannot spare it for Christ, if he call for it, is no true Christian. Do not take it, therefore, as an undoing, to make friends of the



mammon of unrighteousness, and to lay up treasure in heaven, though you leave yourselves little on earth. You lose no great advantage for heaven by becoming poor.

I know where the heart is carnal and covetous, words will not wring men's money out of their hands; they can say all this, and more to others; but saying is one thing, and doing is another. But with those that are true believers, methinks such considerations should prevail. Oh! what abundance of good might ministers do, if they would but live in contempt of the world, and the riches and glory thereof, and expend all they have in their Master's service, and pinch their flesh, that they may have wherewith to do good! This would unlock more hearts to the reception of their doctrine than all your oratory; and, without this, singularity in religion will seem but hypocrisy—and it is likely that it is so. Though we need not do as the Romanists, who betake themselves to monasteries, and cast away property, yet we must have nothing but what we have for God.

IV. Take heed to yourselves, *lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others*, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when you have done, dishonour Him as much as others? Will you proclaim

Christ's governing power, and yet condemn it, and rebel yourselves? Will you preach His laws, and wilfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it? if it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? if it be not, why do you not tell men so? If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? if they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them, and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you "know the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death"? and yet will you do them? "Thou which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" What! shall the same tongue speak evil that speaketh against evil? Shall those lips censure, and slander, and backbite your neighbour, that cry down these and similar things in others? Take heed to yourselves lest you cry down sin, and yet do not overcome it; lest, while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, and become its slaves yourselves: "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin

unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." Oh, brethren ! it is easier to chide at sin than to overcome it.

V. Take heed to yourselves, *that you be not destitute of the qualifications necessary for your work.* He must not be himself a babe in knowledge that will teach men all those mysterious things which are to be known in order to salvation. Oh ! what qualifications are necessary for a man who hath such a charge upon him as we have ! How many difficulties in divinity to be solved ; and these, too, about the very fundamental principles of religion ! How many obscure texts of Scripture to be expounded ! How many duties to be performed, wherein ourselves and others may miscarry, if, in the matter and manner and end, we be not well-informed ! How many sins to be avoided, which, without understanding and foresight, cannot be done ! What a number of sly and subtle temptations must we open to our people's eyes, that they may escape them ! How many weighty, and yet intricate cases of conscience, have we almost daily to resolve ! And can so much work, and such work as this, be done by raw, unqualified men ? Oh ! what strong-holds have we to batter, and how many of them ! What subtle and obstinate resistance must we expect from every heart we deal with ! Prejudice hath so blocked up our

way, that we can scarcely procure a patient hearing. We cannot make a breach in their groundless hopes and carnal peace, but they have twenty shifts and seeming reasons to make it up again; and twenty enemies, that are seeming friends, are ready to help them. We dispute not with them upon equal terms. We have children to reason with, that cannot understand us. We have maniacs to argue with, that will bawl us down with raging nonsense. We have wilful, unreasonable people to deal with, who, when they are silenced, are never the more convinced, and who, when they can give you no reason, will give you their resolution; like the man that Salvian had to deal with, who, being resolved to devour a poor man's substance, and being entreated to forbear, replied, "He could not grant his request, for he had made a vow to take it;" so that the preacher was fain to depart. We dispute the case against men's wills and passions, as much as against their understandings; and these have neither reason nor ears. Their best arguments are, "I will not believe you, nor all the preachers in the world, in such things. I will not change my mind or life; I will not leave my sins; I will never be so precise, come of it what will." We have not one, but multitudes of raging passions, and contradicting enemies, to dispute against at once, whenever we go about the

conversion of a sinner ; as if a man were to dispute in a fair or a tumult, or in the midst of a crowd of violent scolds. What equal dealing, and what success, could here be expected? Yet such is our work ; and it is a work that must be done.

Oh, brethren ! what men should we be in skill, resolution, and unwearied diligence, who have all this to do? Did Paul cry out, “Who is sufficient for these things?” And shall we be proud, or careless, or lazy, as if we were sufficient? As Peter saith to every Christian, in consideration of our great approaching change, “What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!” so may I say to every minister, “Seeing all these things lie upon our hands, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy endeavours and resolutions for our work!” This is not a burden for the shoulders of a child. What skill doth every part of our work require ! and of how much moment is every part ! To preach a sermon, I think, is not the hardest part ; and yet what skill is necessary to make the truth plain—to convince the hearers—to let irresistible light into their consciences, and to keep it there, and drive all home—to screw the truth into their minds, and work Christ into their affections—to meet every objection, and clearly to resolve it—to

drive sinners to a stand, and make them see that there is no hope, but that they must unavoidably either be converted or condemned—and to do all this, in respect of language and manner, as beseems our work, and yet as is most suitable to the capacities of our hearers. This, and a great deal more that should be done in every sermon, must surely be done with a great deal of holy skill. So great a God, whose message we deliver, should be honoured by our delivery of it. It is a lamentable case, that in a message from the God of heaven, of everlasting moment to the souls of men, we should behave ourselves so weakly, so unhandsomely, so imprudently, or so slightly, that the whole business should miscarry in our hands, and God should be dishonoured, and His work disgraced, and sinners rather hardened than converted; and all this through our weakness or neglect! How often have carnal hearers gone jeering home at the palpable and dishonourable failings of the preacher! How many sleep under us because our hearts and tongues are sleepy, and we bring not with us so much skill and zeal as to awake them!

Moreover, what skill is necessary to defend the truth against gainsayers, and to deal with disputing cavillers! And if we fail through weakness, how will they insult over us! Yet that is the smallest matter; but who knows how many weak ones



may thereby be perverted, to their own undoing, and to the trouble of the Church?

What skill is necessary to deal in private with one poor ignorant soul for his conversion!

Oh, brethren! do you not shrink and tremble under the sense of all this work? Will a common measure of holy skill and ability, of prudence and other qualifications, serve for such a task as this? I know, necessity may cause the Church to tolerate the weak; but woe to us if we tolerate and indulge our own weakness! Do not reason and conscience tell you, that if you dare venture on so high a work as this, you should spare no pains to be qualified for the performance of it? It is not now and then an idle snatch or taste of studies that will serve to make an able, sound divine. I know that laziness hath learned to allege the vanity of all our studies, and how entirely the Spirit must qualify us for, and assist us in our work,—as if God commanded us the use of means, and then warranted us to neglect them,—as if it were His way to cause us to thrive in a course of idleness, and to bring us to knowledge by dreams when we are asleep, or to take us up into heaven and show us His counsels, while we think of no such matter, but are idling away our time on earth! Strange that men should dare, by their laziness, to “quench the Spirit,” and then pretend

the Spirit for the doing of it ! God hath required us, that we be “not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Such we must provoke our hearers to be, and such we must be ourselves. Oh ! therefore, brethren, lose no time ! Study, and pray, and confer, and practise ; for in these four ways your abilities must be increased. Take heed to yourselves, lest you are weak through your own negligence, and lest you mar the work of God by your weakness.



## SECTION II.

### *The Motives to this Oversight.*

HAVING showed you what it is to take heed to ourselves, I shall next lay before you some motives to awaken you to this duty.

I. Take heed to yourselves, *for you have a heaven to win or lose, and souls that must be happy or miserable for ever* ; and therefore it concerneth you to begin at home, and to take heed to yourselves as well as to others. Many shall say at that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ?” to whom he will answer, “I never knew you ; depart from me ye that work iniquity.” Oh, brethren, how many men have preached Christ,



and yet have perished for want of a saving interest in him ! How many who are now in hell, have told their people of the torments of hell, and warned them to escape from them ! How many have preached of the wrath of God against sinners, who are now enduring it ! Oh ! what sadder case can there be in the world, than for a man who made it his very trade and calling to proclaim salvation, and to help others to heaven, yet after all to be himself shut out ! Alas ! that we should have so many books in our libraries which tell us the way to heaven ; that we should spend so many years in reading these books, and studying the doctrine of eternal life, and after all this to miss it !—that we should study so many sermons of salvation, and yet fall short of it !—that we should preach so many sermons of damnation, and yet fall into it ? And all because we preached so many sermons of Christ, while yet we neglected him,—of the Spirit, while we resisted it,—of faith, while we did not ourselves believe,—of repentance and conversion, while we continued in an impenitent and unconverted state,—and of a heavenly life, while we remained carnal and earthly ourselves ! If we will be divines only in tongue and title, and have not the divine image upon our souls, nor give up ourselves to the divine honour and will, no wonder if we be separated from the divine pre-

sence, and denied the fruition of God for ever. Believe it, brethren, God is no respecter of persons; he saveth not men for their coats or callings: a holy calling will not save an unholy man. If you stand at the door of the kingdom of grace, to light others in, and will not go in yourselves, you shall knock in vain at the gates of glory. You shall then find that your lamps should have had the oil of grace, as well as ministerial gifts. Do I need to tell you, that preachers of the Gospel must be judged by the Gospel; and stand at the same bar, and be sentenced on the same terms, and dealt with as severely, as any other men? Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, for your own sakes; seeing you have souls to lose or save as well as others.

II. Take heed to yourselves; *for you have a depraved nature, and sinful inclinations, as well as others.* If innocent Adam had need of heed, and lost himself and us for want of it, how much more need have such as we! Sin dwelleth in us, when we have preached ever so much against it; and one degree prepareth the heart for another, and one sin inclineth the mind to more. If one thief be in the house, he will let in the rest; because they have the same disposition and design. A spark is the beginning of a flame; and a small disease may cause a greater. A man who knows

himself to be purblind, should take heed to his feet. Alas! in our hearts, as well as in our hearers', there are an averseness to God, a strangeness to Him—unreasonable and almost unruly passions! In us there is, at the best, the remnants of pride, unbelief, selfishness, and all the most hateful, deadly sins. And doth it not then concern us to take heed to ourselves? Are there so many traitors in our very hearts, and is it unnecessary for us to take heed? You will scarcely allow your little children to go themselves while they are weak, without calling upon them to take heed of falling. And, alas! how weak are those of us that seem strongest! How apt to stumble at a very straw! How small a matter will cast us down, by enticing us to folly, or kindling our passions and inordinate desires, by perverting our judgments, weakening our resolutions, cooling our zeal, and abating our diligence! These treacherous hearts of yours will, one time or other, deceive you, if you take not heed. Those sins that seem now to lie dead, will revive: your pride, and worldliness, and many a noisome vice, will spring up, that you thought had been weeded out by the roots. It is most necessary, therefore, that men of so much infirmity should take heed to themselves, and be careful in the oversight of their own souls.

III. Take heed to yourselves; *because you are exposed to greater temptations than other men.* If you will be the leaders against the prince of darkness, he will spare you no further than God restraineth him. He beareth the greatest malice to those that are engaged to do him the greatest mischief. As he hateth Christ more than any of us, because he is the General of the field—the Captain of our salvation,—and doth more than all the world beside against his kingdom; so doth he hate the leaders under him more than the common soldiers: he knows what a rout he may make among them, if the leaders fall before their eyes. He hath long tried that way of fighting, neither against great or small comparatively, but of smiting the shepherds, that he may scatter the flock: and so great hath been his success this way, that he will follow it as far as he is able. Take heed, therefore, brethren, for the enemy hath a special eye upon you. You shall have his most subtle insinuations, and incessant solicitations, and violent assaults. As wise and learned as you are, take heed to yourselves lest he outwit you. The devil is a greater scholar than you, and a nimbler disputant: he can transform himself into an angel of light to deceive: he will get within you, and trip up your heels before you are aware: he will play the juggler with you undiscerned, and cheat you

of your faith or innocence, and you shall not know that you have lost it; nay, he will make you believe it is multiplied or increased, when it is lost. You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait. And his bait shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition, that he will be sure to find advantages within you, and make your own principles and inclinations betray you; and whenever he ruineth you, he will make you the instruments of ruin to others. Oh! what a conquest will he think he hath got, if he can make a minister lazy and unfaithful—if he can tempt a minister into covetousness or scandal! He will glory against the Church, and say, “These are your holy preachers! You see what their preciseness is, and whither it brings them.” He will glory against Jesus Christ himself, and say, “These are thy champions! I can make thy chief servants abuse thee; I can make the stewards of thy house unfaithful.” If he did so insult God upon a false surmise, and tell Him he could make Job curse Him to His face, what will he do if he should prevail against us? And at last he will insult as much over you, that he could draw you to be false to your great trust, and to blemish your holy profession, and to do so much service to him who was your enemy. Oh! do not so far gratify Satan—do not afford him so

much sport—suffer him not to use you as the Philistines did Samson,—first to deprive you of your strength, and then to put out your eyes, and so to make you the matter of his triumph and derision.

IV. Take heed to yourselves, *because there are many eyes upon you, and consequently there will be many to observe your falls.* You cannot miscarry but the world will ring of it. The eclipses of the sun by day are seldom without witnesses. As you take yourselves for the lights of the Churches, you may expect that men's eyes will be upon you. If other men may sin without observation, so cannot you. And you should thankfully consider how great a mercy this is, that you have so many eyes to watch over you, and so many ready to tell you of your faults; and thus have greater helps than others, at least for the restraining of you from sin. Though they may do it with a malicious mind, yet you have the advantage of it. God forbid that we should prove so impudent, as to do evil in the public view of all, and to sin wilfully while the world is gazing on us; "They that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night." Why, consider that you are always in the open light; even the light of your own doctrine will expose your evil doings. While you are as lights set upon a hill, think not to lie hid. Take heed,



therefore, to yourselves, and do your work as those that remember that the world looks on them, and that with the quick-sighted eye of malice, ready to make the worst of all, to find the smallest fault where it is, to aggravate it where they find it, to divulge it, and to take advantage of it, and to make faults where they cannot find them. How cautiously, then, should we walk before so many ill-minded observers !

V. Take heed to yourselves ; *for your sins have more heinous aggravations than other men's*. It was a saying of King Alphonsus, that “a great man cannot commit a small sin ;” much more may we say that a learned man, or a teacher of others, cannot commit a small sin ; or, at least, that the sin is great, as committed by him, which is smaller, as committed by another.

1. You are more likely than others to sin against knowledge, because you have more than they ; at least, you sin against more light, or means of knowledge. What ! do you not know that covetousness and pride are sins ? do you not know what it is to be unfaithful to your trust, and, by negligence or selfishness to betray men's souls ? You know your “Master's will, and if you do it not, you shall be beaten with many stripes.” There must needs be the more wilfulness, in proportion as there is the more knowledge.

2. Your sins have more hypocrisy in them than other men's, by how much the more you have spoken against them. Oh! what a heinous thing is it in us, to study how to disgrace sin to the utmost, and make it as odious in the eyes of our people as we can, and when we have done, to live in it, and secretly cherish that which we publicly disgrace! What vile hypocrisy is it, to make it our daily work to cry it down, and yet to keep to it—to call it publicly all naught, and privately to make it our bed-fellow and companion—to bind heavy burdens on others, and not to touch them ourselves with a finger! What can you say to this in the judgment? Did you think as ill of sin as you spoke, or did you not? If you did not, why would you dissemblingly speak against it? If you did, why would you cherish it, and commit it? Oh! bear not that badge of a hypocritical Pharisee, "They say, but do not." Many a minister of the Gospel will be confounded, and not be able to look up, by reason of this heavy charge of hypocrisy.

3. Your sins have more perfidiousness in them than other men's, by how much the more you have engaged yourselves against them. Besides all your common engagements as Christians, you have many more as Ministers. How often have you proclaimed the evil and danger of sin, and called sinners from it? How often have you denounced



against it the terrors of the Lord? All this surely implied that you renounced it yourselves. Every sermon that you preached against it, every exhortation, every confession of it in the congregation, did lay an engagement upon you to forsake it. Every child that you baptized, and every administration of the Supper of the Lord, did import your own renouncing of the world and the flesh, and your engagement to Christ. How often and how openly have you borne witness to the odiousness and damnable nature of sin? and yet will you entertain it, notwithstanding all these professions and testimonies of your own? Oh! what treachery is it to make such a stir against it in the pulpit and, after all, to entertain it in thy heart, and give it the room that is due to God!

VI. Take heed to yourselves; *because such important works as ours require greater grace than other men's.* Weaker gifts and graces may carry a man through in a more even course of life, that is not liable to so great trials. Smaller strength may serve for lighter work and burdens. But if you will venture on the great undertakings of the ministry—if you will lead on the troops of Christ against Satan and his followers—if you will engage yourselves against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places—if you will undertake to rescue captive sinners out of the

devil's paws,—do not think that a heedless, careless course will accomplish so great a work as this. You must look to come off with greater shame, and deeper wounds of conscience, than if you had lived a common life, if you think to go through such momentous things as these with a careless soul. It is not only the work that calls for heed, but the workman also, that he may be fit for business of such weight. We have seen many men who lived as private Christians, in good reputation for parts and piety, when they took upon them either the magistracy or military employment, where the work was above their gifts, and temptations did overmatch their strength, who have proved scandalous disgraced men. And we have seen some private Christians of good esteem, who, having thought too highly of their parts, and thrust themselves into the ministerial office, have proved weak and empty men, and have become greater burdens to the Church than some whom we endeavoured to cast out. They might have done God more service in the higher rank of private men, than they do among the lowest of the ministry. If, then, you will venture into the midst of enemies, and bear the burden and heat of the day, take heed to yourselves.

VII. Take heed to yourselves; *for the honour of your Lord and Master, and of his holy truth*

*and ways, doth lie more on you than on other men.* As you may render Him more service, so you may do Him more disservice than others. The nearer men stand to God, the greater dishonour is done to Him by their miscarriages ; and the more will they be imputed by foolish men, to God Himself. The heavy judgments executed on Eli and on his house, were because they kicked at His sacrifice and offering—"For therefore was the sin of the young men great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord." It was that great aggravation, of "causing the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," which provoked God to deal more sharply with David than He would otherwise have done. If you be indeed Christians, the glory of God will be dearer to you than your lives. Take heed, therefore, what you do against it, as you would take heed what you do against your lives.

Would it not wound you to the heart to hear the name and truth of God reproached for your sakes—to see men point to you, and say, "There goes a covetous priest, or a drunken ; these are they that preach for strictness, when they themselves can live as loose as others ; they condemn us by their sermons, and condemn themselves by their lives ; notwithstanding all their talk, they are as bad as we." Oh ! brethren, could your hearts endure to hear men cast the taunt of your

iniquities in the face of the holy God, and in the face of the Gospel, and of all that desire to fear the Lord? Would it not break your hearts to think that all the godly Christians about you should suffer reproach for your misconduct? Why, if one of you that is a leader of the flock, should be ensnared but once into some scandalous crime, there is scarcely a man or woman that seeketh diligently after their salvation, within the hearing of it, but, besides the grief of their hearts for your sin, are likely to have it cast in their teeth by the ungodly about them, however much they may detest it, and lament it. The ungodly husband will tell the wife, and the ungodly parents will tell their children, and ungodly neighbours and fellow-servants will be telling one another of it, saying, ‘These are your godly preachers! see what comes of all your stir; are you any better than others? You are even all alike.’ Such words as these must all the godly in the country hear for your sakes.

“It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom they come.” Oh! take heed, brethren, of every word you speak, and of every step you tread, for you bear the ark of the Lord,—you are entrusted with His honour? If you that “know his will, and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of

the law, and are confident that you yourselves are guides of the blind, and lights to them that are in darkness, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes,"—if you, I say, should live contrary to your doctrine, and "by breaking the law, should dishonour God, the name of God will be blasphemed among the ignorant and ungodly through you." And you are not unacquainted with that standing decree of heaven—"Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Never did man dishonour God but it proved the greatest dishonour to himself. God will find out ways enough to wipe off any stain cast upon Him; but you will not so easily remove the shame and sorrow from yourselves.

VIII. Take heed to yourselves; *for the success of all your labours doth very much depend upon it.* God useth to qualify men for great works, before he employs them as instruments in accomplishing them. Now, if the work of the Lord be not soundly done upon your own hearts, how can you expect that He will bless your labours for effecting it in others? He may do it, if He please, but you have much cause to doubt whether He will. I shall here mention some reasons which may satisfy you, that he who would be a means of saving others, must take heed to himself, and that God

doth seldom prosper the labours of unsanctified men.

1. Can it be expected that God will bless that man's labours, (I mean comparatively, as to other ministers,) who worketh not for God, but for himself? Now, this is the case of every unsanctified man. None but the converted do make God their chief end, and do all or anything heartily for His honour; others make the ministry but a trade to live by. They choose it rather than another calling, because their parents did destine them to it, or because it is a life wherein they have more opportunity to furnish their intellects with all kinds of science; and because it is not so toilsome to the body, to those that have a mind to favour their flesh; and because it is accompanied with some reverence and respect from men, and because they think it a fine thing to be leaders and teachers, and have others "receive the law at their mouth." For such ends as these are they ministers, and for these do they preach; and, were it not for these, or similar objects, they would soon give over. And can it be expected that God should much bless the labours of such men? It is not for Him they preach, but themselves, and their own reputation or gain. It is not Him, but themselves, that they seek and serve; and, therefore, no wonder if He leave them to themselves for the success, and if



their labours have no greater blessing than themselves can give, and if the word reach no further than their own strength can make it reach.

2. Can you think that he is likely to be as successful as others, who dealeth not heartily and faithfully in his work—who believeth not what he saith, and is not truly serious when he seemeth to be most diligent? And can you think that any unsanctified man can be hearty and serious in the ministerial work? A kind of seriousness indeed he may have, such as proceedeth from a common faith or opinion that the word is true; or he may be actuated by a natural fervour, or by selfish ends: but the seriousness and fidelity of a sound believer, who ultimately intendeth God's glory, and men's salvation, this he hath not. Oh! my brethren, all your preaching and persuading of others will be but dreaming and vile hypocrisy till the work be thoroughly done upon your own hearts. How can you set yourselves, day and night, to a work to which your hearts are averse? How can you call, with serious fervour, upon poor sinners to repent and return to God, that never repented or returned yourselves? How can you follow poor sinners, with importunate solicitations to take heed to sin, and to lead a holy life, who never felt yourselves the evil of sin, or the worth of holiness? These things are never well known



till they are felt, nor well felt till they are possessed: and he that feeleth them not himself is not likely to speak feelingly of them to others, nor to help others to the feeling of them. How can you follow sinners, with compassion in your hearts and tears in your eyes, and beseech them, in the name of the Lord, to stop their course, and return and live, that never had so much compassion on your own soul, as to do this much for yourselves? What! can you love other men better than yourselves? Can you have pity on them, who have no pity upon yourselves?

Brethren, do you think they will be heartily diligent to save men from hell, who are not heartily persuaded that there is a hell? Or to bring men to heaven, that do not truly believe that there is a heaven? As Calvin saith on my text—"He will never diligently labour for the salvation of others, who neglecteth his own. He who hath not so strong a belief of the Word of God, and of the life to come, as will withdraw his own heart from the vanities of this world, and excite him to holy diligence for salvation, cannot be expected to be faithful in seeking the salvation of other men. Surely he that dare damn himself, dare let others alone in the way to damnation; he that, like Judas, will sell his Master for silver, will not stick to make merchandise of the flock; he that will renounce

his hopes of heaven rather than leave his worldly pleasures, will hardly leave them for the saving of others. We may naturally conceive that he will have no pity on others who is wilfully cruel to himself; that he is not to be trusted with other men's souls, who is unfaithful to his own, and will sell it to the devil for the short pleasures of sin. I CONFESS THAT MAN SHALL NEVER HAVE MY CONSENT TO HAVE THE CHARGE OF OTHER MEN'S SOULS, AND TO OVERSEE THEM IN ORDER TO THEIR SALVATION, THAT TAKES NOT HEED TO HIMSELF, BUT IS CARELESS OF HIS OWN.

3. Do you think it is a likely thing that he will fight against Satan with all his might, who is himself a servant to Satan! Will he do any great harm to the kingdom of the devil, who is himself a member and a subject of that kingdom? Will he be faithful to Christ who is in covenant with his enemy? Now, this is the case of all unsanctified men, of whatever rank or profession they be. They are the servants of Satan, and the subjects of his kingdom; and are they like to be true to Christ, that are ruled by the devil? What prince will choose the friends and servants of his enemy to lead his armies in war against him? Oh! how many such traitors have been in the Church of Christ in all ages, who have done more against him, under his colours, than they could

have done in the open field ! They speak well of Christ, and godliness in the general, and yet slily do what they can to bring them into disgrace, and make men believe that those who set themselves to seek God with all their hearts, are a company of enthusiasts or hypocrites. Alas ! how many such wolves have been set over the sheep ! If there was a traitor among the twelve, in Christ's family, no wonder if there be many now. Publicans and harlots do sooner enter heaven than Pharisees, because they are sooner convinced of their sinfulness and misery.

4. It is not likely that the people will regard the doctrine of such men, when they see that they do not live as they preach. They will think that he doth not mean as he speaks, if he do not live as he speaks. They will hardly believe a man that seemeth not to believe himself. If one bid you run for your lives, because a bear or an enemy is at your backs, and yet do not mend his pace himself, you will be tempted to think that he is but in jest, and that there is really no such danger as he alleges. When preachers tell people of the necessity of holiness, and that without it no man shall see the Lord, and yet remain unholy themselves, the people will think they do but talk to pass away the hour, and because they must say somewhat for their money, and that all these are but words of course.

They will give you leave to preach against their sins, and to talk as much as you will for godliness in the pulpit, if you will but let them alone afterwards, and be friendly and merry with them when you have done, and talk as they do, and live as they, and be indifferent with them in your conversation. For they take the pulpit to be but a stage; a place where preachers must show themselves, and play their parts; where you have liberty for an hour to say what you please; and what you say they regard not, unless you show them, by saying it personally to their faces, that you were in good earnest, and did indeed mean them. Is that man then likely to do much good, or fit to be a minister of Christ, that will speak for him an hour on the Sabbath, and, by his life, will preach against him all the week, yea, and give his public words the lie?

5. Consider whether the success of your labours depends not on the assistance and blessing of the Lord. And where hath He made any promise of His assistance and blessing to ungodly men? If He do promise His Church a blessing even by such, yet doth He not promise them any blessing. To His faithful servants He hath promised that He will be with them, that He will put His Spirit upon them, and that Satan shall fall before them as lightning from heaven.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE OVERSIGHT OF THE FLOCK.



## SECTION I.

*The Nature of this Oversight.*

WE shall now proceed to consider the duty which is recommended in the text—*Take heed to all the flock.*

It is, you see, *all* the flock, or every individual member of our charge. To this end it is necessary that we should know every person that belongeth to our charge; for how can we take heed to them if we do not know them? We must labour to be acquainted, not only with the persons, but with the state of all our people—with their inclinations and conversation.

Being thus acquainted with all the flock, we must afterward take heed to them. One would imagine that every reasonable man would be satisfied of this, and that it would need no further proof. Doth not a careful shepherd look after

every individual sheep ? and a good teacher after every individual scholar ? and a good physician after every particular patient ? and a good commander after every individual soldier ? Why then should not the shepherds, the teachers, the physicians, the guides of the Church of Christ, take heed to every individual member of their charge ? Christ himself, the great and good Shepherd, that hath the whole to look after, doth yet take care of every individual ; like him whom he describes in the parable, who left “ the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness, to seek after one that was lost.” The prophets were often sent to single men. Ezekiel was made a watchman over individuals ; and was commanded to say to the wicked, “ Thou shalt surely die.” Paul taught his hearers not only “ publicly, but from house to house ;” and in another place he tells us, that he “ warned every man, and taught every man, in all wisdom, that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Many other passages of Scripture make it evident, that it is our duty to take heed to every individual of our flock ; and many passages in the ancient councils do plainly show, that this was the practice of the primitive ages ; but I shall quote only one from Ignatius—“ Let assemblies,” says he, “ be often gathered ; inquire after all by name ; despise not servant-men or maids.” You see it



was then considered as a duty to look after every member of the flock by name, not excepting the meanest servant-man or maid.

But some one may object, "The congregation that I am set over is so great that it is impossible for me to know them all, much more to take heed to all individually."

To this I answer, Is it necessity or is it not, that hath cast upon you such a charge? If it be not, you excuse one sin by another. How durst you undertake what you knew yourself unable to perform, when you were not forced to it? It would seem you had some other end in undertaking it, and never intended to be faithful to your trust. But if you think that you were necessitated to undertake it, I would ask you, might you not have procured assistance for so great a charge? Have you done all you could with your friends and neighbours, to get maintenance for another to help you? Have you not as much maintenance yourself as might serve yourself and another? What though it will not serve to maintain you in fulness? Is it not more reasonable that you should pinch your flesh and family, than undertake a work that you cannot perform, and neglect the souls of so many of your flock? I know that what I say will seem hard to some, but to me it is an unquestionable thing that, if you have but a hundred pounds



a year, it is your duty to live upon part of it, and allow the rest to a competent assistant, rather than that the flock you are over should be neglected. If you say that is a hard measure—your wife and children cannot so live—I answer, 1. Do not many families in your parish live on less? 2. Have not many able ministers in the prelate's days been glad of less, with liberty to preach the Gospel? There are some yet living, as I have heard, who have offered the bishops to enter into bond to preach for nothing, if they might but have liberty to preach the Gospel. 3. If you shall still say, that you cannot live so meanly as poor people do, I further ask, Can your parishioners better endure damnation, than you can endure want and poverty? What! do you call yourselves ministers of the Gospel, and yet are the souls of men so base in your eyes, that you had rather they should eternally perish, than that you and your family should live in a low and poor condition? Nay, should you not rather beg your bread, than put so important a matter as men's salvation upon a hazard or disadvantage—yea, as hazard the damnation of but one soul? Oh! brethren, it is a miserable thing when men study and talk of heaven and hell, and the fewness of the saved, and the difficulty of salvation, and be not all the while in good earnest. If you were, you could never surely

stick at such matters as these, and let your people go down to hell, that you might live in higher style in this world. Remember this, the next time you are preaching to them, that they cannot be saved without knowledge; and hearken whether conscience do not tell you, "It is likely they might be brought to knowledge, if they had but diligent instruction and exhortation privately, man by man; and if there were another minister to assist me, this might be done; and if I would live sparingly, and deny my flesh, I might have an assistant? Dare I, then, let my people live in that ignorance which I myself have told them is damning, rather than put myself and family to a little want?"

Must I turn to my Bible to show a preacher where it is written that a man's soul is worth more than a world—much more, therefore, than a hundred pounds a year? Or that both we and all that we have are God's, and should be employed to the utmost for His service? Or that it is inhuman cruelty to let souls go to hell, for fear my wife and children should fare somewhat the harder, or live at lower rates; when, according to God's ordinary way of working by means, I might do much to prevent their misery, if I would but a little displease my flesh, which all, who are Christ's, have crucified with its lusts? Every man must render

to God the things that are God's, and that, let it be remembered, is all he possesses. How are all things sanctified to us, but in the separation and dedication of them to God? Are not they all His talents, and must be employed to His glory? Must not every Christian first ask, In what way may I most honour God with my substance? Do we not preach these things to our people? Are they true to them and not to us? Yea, more, is not the Church-maintenance devoted, in a special manner, to the service of God for the Church? And should we not then use it for the utmost furtherance of that end? If any minister who hath two hundred pounds a year, can prove that a hundred pounds of it may do God more service if it be laid out on himself, or wife and children, than if it maintain one or two suitable assistants to help forward the salvation of the flock, I shall not presume to reprove his expenses; but where this cannot be proved, let not the practice be justified.

And I must further say, that this poverty is not so intolerable and dangerous a thing as it is pretended to be. If you have but food and raiment, must you not therewith be content? and what would you have more than that which may fit you for the work of God? It is not "purple and fine linen," and faring sumptuously every day," that is necessary for this purpose. "A man's life consisteth

not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." If your clothing be warm, and your food be wholesome, you may be as well supported by it to do God service, as if you had the fullest satisfaction to your flesh. A patched coat may be warm, and bread and water are wholesome food. He that wanteth not these, hath but a poor excuse to make for hazarding men's souls, that he may live on dainties.

But, while it is our duty to take heed to all the flock, we must pay special attention to some classes in particular. By many, this is very imperfectly understood, and therefore I shall dwell a little upon it.

I. *We must labour, in a special manner, for the conversion of the unconverted.*

The work of conversion is the great thing we must drive at; after this we must labour with all our might. Alas! the misery of the unconverted is so great, that it calleth loudest to us for compassion. They "are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," and have yet no part nor fellowship in the pardon of their sins, or the hope of glory. We have, therefore, a work of greater necessity to do for them, even "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among

them who are sanctified.” He that seeth one man sick of a mortal disease, and another only pained with the toothache, will be moved more to compassion the former, than the latter ; and will surely make more haste to help him, though he were a stranger, and the other a brother or a son. It is so sad a case to see men in a state of damnation, wherein, if they should die, they are lost for ever, that methinks we should not be able to let them alone, either in public or private, whatever other work we have to do. I confess, I am frequently forced to neglect that which should tend to the further increase of knowledge in the godly, because of the lamentable necessity of the unconverted. Who is able to talk of controversies, or of nice, unnecessary points, or even of truths of a lower degree of necessity, how excellent soever, while he seeth a company of ignorant, carnal, miserable sinners before his eyes, who must be changed or damned ? Methinks I even see them entering upon their final woe ! Methinks I hear them crying out for help—for speediest help ! Their misery speaks the louder because they have not hearts to ask for help themselves. Many a time have I known that I had some hearers of higher fancies, that looked for rarities, and were addicted to despise the ministry, if I told them not something more than ordinary ; and yet I could not

find in my heart to turn from the necessities of the impenitent, for the humouring of them; nor even to leave speaking to miserable sinners for their salvation, in order to speak so much as should otherwise be done to weak saints for their confirmation and increase in grace. Methinks, as Paul's "spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the Athenians wholly given to idolatry," so it should cast us into one of his paroxysms to see so many men in the greatest danger of being everlastingly undone. Methinks, if by faith we did indeed look upon them as within a step of hell, it would more effectually untie our tongues, than Croesus' danger did his son's. He that will let a sinner go down to hell for want of speaking to him, doth set less by souls than did the Redeemer of souls; and less by his neighbour than common charity will allow him to do by his greatest enemy. Oh! therefore, brethren, whomsoever you neglect, neglect not the most miserable! Whatever you pass over, forget not poor souls that are under the condemnation and curse of the law, and who may look every hour for the infernal execution, if a speedy change do not prevent it. Oh! call after the impenitent, and ply this great work of converting souls, whatever else you leave undone.

II. *We must be ready to give advice to inquirers who come to us with cases of conscience; especially*



the great case which the Jews put to Peter, and the gaoler to Paul and Silas—"What must we do to be saved?" A minister is not to be merely a public preacher, but to be known as a counsellor for their souls, as the physician is for their bodies, and the lawyers for their estates; so that each man who is in doubts and straits, may bring his case to him for resolution, as Nicodemus came to Christ, and as it was usual with the people of old, to go to the priest, "whose lips must keep knowledge, and at whose mouth they must ask the law, because he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." But as the people have become unacquainted with this office of the ministry, and with their own duty and necessity in this respect, it belongeth to us to acquaint them with it, and to press them publicly to come to us for advice about the great concerns of their souls. We must not only be willing to take the trouble, but should draw it upon ourselves, by inviting them to come. What abundance of good might we do, could we but bring them to this? And, doubtless, much might be done in it if we did our duty. How few have I ever heard of who have heartily pressed their people to their duty in this respect! Oh! it is a sad case that men's souls should be so injured and hazarded by the total neglect of so great a duty, and that ministers should scarcely ever tell



them of it, and awaken them to it. Were your hearers but duly sensible of the need and importance of this, you would have them more frequently knocking at your doors, and making known to you their sad complaints, and begging your advice. I beseech you, then, press them more to this duty for the future; and see that you perform it carefully, when they do seek your help. To this end it is very necessary that you be well acquainted with practical cases, and especially that you be acquainted with the nature of saving grace, and able to assist them in trying their state, and in resolving the main question that concerns their everlasting life or death. One word of seasonable, prudent advice, given by a minister to persons in necessity, may be of more use than many sermons. "A word fitly spoken," says Solomon, "how good is it!"

III. *We must study to build up those who are already truly converted.* In this respect our work is various, according to the various states of Christians.

1. There are many of our flock that are young and weak, who, though they are of long standing, are yet of small proficiency or strength. This, indeed, is the most common condition of the godly. Most of them content themselves with low degrees of grace; and it is no easy matter to get them

higher. To bring them to higher and stricter opinions, is comparatively easy—that is, to bring them from the truth into error, on the right hand as well as on the left; but to increase their knowledge and gifts is not easy, and to increase their graces is the hardest of all. It is a very sad thing for Christians to be weak: it exposeth us to danger, it abateth our consolations, and taketh off the sweetness of wisdom's ways; it maketh us less serviceable to God and man—to bring less honour to our Master, and to do less good to all about us.

Now, seeing the case of weakness in the converted is so sad, how diligent should we be to cherish and increase their grace! The strength of Christians is the honour of the Church. When they are inflamed with the love of God, and live by a lively working faith, and set light by the profits and honours of the world, and love one another with a pure heart fervently, and can bear and heartily forgive a wrong, and suffer joyfully for the cause of Christ, and study to do good, and walk inoffensively and harmlessly in the world—are ready to be servants to all men for their good, becoming all things to all men in order to win them to Christ, and yet abstaining from the appearance of evil, and seasoning all their actions with a sweet mixture of prudence, humility, zeal, and heavenly-mindedness, oh! what an honour are

such to their professions! What an ornament to the Church! and how serviceable to God and man! Men would sooner believe that the Gospel is from heaven, if they saw more such effects of it upon the hearts and lives of them who profess it. The world is better able to read the nature of religion in a man's life than in the Bible. "They that obey not the word, may be won by the conversation" of such as are thus eminent for godliness. It is, therefore, a most important part of our work, to labour more in the polishing and perfecting of the saints, that they may be strong in the Lord, and fitted for their Master's service.

2. Another class of converts that need our special help, are those who labour under some particular corruption, which keeps under their graces, and makes them a trouble to others, and a burden to themselves. Alas! there are too many such persons. Some are particularly addicted to pride, and others to worldly-mindedness; some to sensual desires, and others to frowardness, or other evil passions. Now it is our duty to give assistance to all these; and partly by dissuasions and clear discoveries of the odiousness of the sin, and partly by suitable directions about the remedy, to help them to a more complete conquest of their corruptions. We are leaders of Christ's army against the powers of hell, and must resist all the works

of darkness wherever we find them, even though it should be in the children of light. We must be no more tender of the sins of the godly than of the ungodly, nor any more befriend them, or favour them. By how much more we love their persons, by so much the more must we manifest it, by making opposition to their sins.

3. Another class who demand special help, are declining Christians, that are either fallen into some sin, or else abate their zeal and diligence, and show that they have lost their former love! As the case of backsliders is very sad, so our diligence must be very great for their recovery. It is sad to them to lose so much of their life, and peace, and serviceableness to God; and to become so serviceable to Satan and his cause! It is sad to us to see that all our labour is come to this, and that, when we have taken so much pains with them, and have had so much hopes of them, all should be so far frustrated! It is saddest of all that God should be so dishonoured by those whom He hath so loved, and for whom He hath done so much, and that Christ should be so wounded in the house of his friends. Besides, partial backsliding hath a natural tendency to total apostacy, and would effect it, if special grace did not prevent it.

Now, the more melancholy the case of such

Christians is, the more must we exert ourselves for their recovery. We must "restore those that are overtaken in a fault, in the spirit of meekness," and yet see that the sore be thoroughly searched and healed, and the joint be well set again, whatever pain it may cost. We must look especially to the honour of the Gospel, and see that they give such evidence of repentance, and make such full confession of their sin, that some reparation be thereby made to the Church, and their holy profession, for the wound they have given to religion. Much skill is necessary for restoring such a soul.

4. The last class whom I shall here notice, as requiring our attention, are the strong; for they, also, have need of our assistance: partly to preserve the grace they have; partly to help them in making further progress, and partly to direct them in improving their strength for the service of Christ, and the assistance of their brethren; and also to encourage them to persevere, that they may receive the crown. All these are the objects of the ministerial work, and in respect to each of them, we must "take heed to all the flock."

IV. *We must have a special eye upon families*, to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed. The life of religion, and the welfare and glory both of the Church and State, depend much on family government and

duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all. What are we like to do ourselves to the reforming of a congregation, if all the work be cast on us alone, and masters of families neglect that necessary duty of their own, by which they are bound to help us! If any good be begun by the ministry in any soul, a careless, prayerless, worldly family is likely to stifle it, or very much hinder it; whereas, if you could but get the rulers of families to do their duty, to take up the work where you left it, and help it on, what abundance of good might be done! I beseech you, therefore, if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people, do all you can to promote family religion. To this end, let me entreat you to attend to the following things:—

1. Get information how each family is ordered, that you may know how to proceed in your endeavours for their further good.

2. Go occasionally among them, when they are likely to be most at leisure, and ask the master of the family, Whether he prays with them, and reads the Scripture, or what he doth? Labour to convince such as neglect this, of their sin; and if you have opportunity, pray with them before you go, and set them an example of what you would have them do. Perhaps, too, it might be well to get



a promise from them, that they will make more conscience of their duty for the future.

3. If you find any, through ignorance and want of practice, unable to pray, persuade them to study their own wants, and to get their hearts affected with them, and, in the meanwhile, advise them to use a form of prayer, rather than not pray at all. Tell them, however, that it is their sin and shame that they have lived so negligently as to be so ignorant of their own necessities as not to know how to address God in prayer, when every beggar can find words to ask an alms; and, therefore, that a form of prayer is but for necessity, as a crutch to a cripple, while they cannot do without it; but that they must resolve not to be content with it, but to learn to do better as speedily as possible, seeing prayer should come from the bottom of the heart, and be varied according to our necessities and circumstances.

4. See that in every family there are some useful books, beside the Bible. If they have none, persuade them to buy some: if they be not able to buy them, give them some if you can. If you are not able yourself, get some gentlemen, or other rich persons, that are ready to good works, to do it. And engage them to read them at night, when they have leisure, and especially on the Lord's day.



5. Direct them how to spend the Lord's day ; how to dispatch their worldly business so as to prevent incumbrances and distractions ; and when they have been at church, how to spend the time in their families. The life of religion dependeth much on this, because poor people have little more time ; and, therefore, if they lose this, they lose all, and will remain ignorant and brutish. Persuade the master of every family to cause his children and servants to repeat some Scripture to him every Sabbath evening, and to give him some account of what they have heard at church during the day.

Neglect not, I beseech you, this important part of your work. Get masters of families to do their duty, and they will not only spare you a great deal of labour, but they will essentially promote the success of your labours. If a captain can get the officers under him to do their duty, he may rule the soldiers with far less trouble than if all lay upon his shoulders. You are not likely to see any general reformation, till you procure family reformation. Some little religion there may be, here and there, but while it is confined to single persons, and is not promoted in the family circle, it will not prosper, nor promise much future increase.

V. *We must be diligent in visiting the sick, and*

assisting them to prepare either for a fruitful life or a happy death. Though this should be the business of all our life, yet doth it, at such a season, require extraordinary care both of them and us. When time is almost gone, and they must now or never be reconciled to God, oh ! how doth it concern them to redeem those hours, and to lay hold on eternal life ! And when we see that we are like to have but a few days or hours more to speak to them, in order to their everlasting welfare, who, that is not a block or an infidel, would not be much with them, and do all he can for their salvation in that short space !

Will it not awaken us to compassion, to look on a languishing man, and to think that within a few days, his soul will be in heaven or in hell ? Surely it will try the faith and seriousness of ministers, to be much about dying men ! They will thus have opportunity to discern whether they themselves are in good earnest about the matters of the life to come. So great is the change that is made by death, that it should awaken us to the greatest sensibility to see a man so near it, and should excite in us the deepest pangs of compassion, to do the office of inferior angels for the soul, before it departs from the body, that it may be ready for the convoy of superior angels to the "inheritance of the saints in light." When a man is almost at

his journey's end, and the next step brings him to heaven or hell, it is time for us, while there is hope, to help him, if we can.

And as their present necessity should move us to embrace that opportunity for their good, so should the advantage that sickness and the prospect of death affordeth. Even the stoutest sinners will hear us on their death-bed, though they scorned us before. They will then let fall their fury, and be as gentle as lambs, who were before as untractable as lions. I find not one in ten, of the most obstinate scornful wretches in my parish, but when they come to die, will humble themselves, confess their faults, and seem penitent, and promise, if they should recover, to reform their lives. Oh! how resolvedly will the worst of sinners seem to cast away their sins, and cry out of their folly, and of the vanity of this world, when they see that death is in good earnest with them! Perhaps you will say, that these forced changes are not cordial, and that, therefore, we have no great hope of doing them any saving good. I confess it is very common for sinners to be frightened into ineffectual purposes, but not so common to be, at such a season, converted to the Saviour.

## SECTION II.

*The Manner of this Oversight.*

HAVING thus considered the nature of this oversight, we shall next speak of the manner; not of each part distinctly, lest we be tedious, but of the whole in general.

I. The ministerial work must be carried on *purely for God and the salvation of souls, not for any private ends of our own*. A wrong end makes all the work bad, how good soever it may be in its own nature. It is not serving God, but ourselves, if we do it not for God, but for ourselves. They who engage in this as a common work, to make a trade of it for their worldly livelihood, will find that they have chosen a bad trade, though a good employment. Self-denial is of absolute necessity in every Christian, but it is doubly necessary in a minister, as without it he cannot do God an hour's faithful service. Hard study, much knowledge, and excellent preaching, if the ends be not right, is but more glorious, hypocritical sinning.

II. The ministerial work must be carried on *diligently and laboriously*, as being of such un-

speakingable consequence to ourselves and others. We are seeking to uphold the world—to save it from the curse of God—to perfect the creation—to attain the ends of Christ's death—to save ourselves and others from damnation—to overcome the devil, and demolish his kingdom—and to set up the kingdom of Christ, and to attain and help others to the kingdom of glory. And are these works to be done with a careless mind, or a lazy hand? Oh! see, then, that this work be done with all your might. Study hard, for the well is deep, and our brains are shallow. But especially be laborious in the practice and exercise of your knowledge. Let Paul's words ring continually in your ears, "Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." Ever think with yourselves what lieth upon your hands—"If I do not bestir myself, Satan may prevail, and the people everlastingly perish, and their blood be required at my hand."

If we were duly devoted to our work, it would be done more vigorously, and more seriously, than it is by the most of us. How few ministers do preach with all their might, or speak about everlasting joys and everlasting torments in such a manner as may make men believe that they are in good earnest. It would make a man's heart ache, to see a company of dead, drowsy sinners sitting

under a minister, and not hear a word that is likely to quicken or awaken them. Alas! we speak so drowsily and so softly, that sleepy sinners cannot hear! The blow falls so light, that hard-hearted sinners cannot feel! The most of ministers will not so much as exert their voice, and stir up themselves to an earnest utterance. But if they do speak loud and earnestly, how few do answer it with weight and earnestness of matter! And yet, without this the voice doth little good; the people will esteem it but mere bawling, when the matter doth not correspond. It would grieve one to the heart to hear what excellent doctrine some ministers have in hand, while yet they let it die in their hands for want of close and lively application. What fit matter they have for convincing sinners, and how little they make of it! what good they might do if they would set it home, and yet they cannot or will not do it! Oh, brethren, how plainly, how closely, how earnestly, should we deliver a message of such importance as ours, when the everlasting life or everlasting death of our fellow-men is involved in it! Methinks we are in nothing so defective as in this seriousness; yet is there nothing more unsuitable to such a business than to be slight and dull. What! speak coldly for God, and for men's salvation! Can we believe that our people must be converted or condemned,



and yet speak in a drowsy tone ! In the name of God, brethren, labour to awaken your own hearts before you go to the pulpit, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. Remember they must be awakened or damned, and that a sleepy preacher will hardly awaken drowsy sinners. Though you should extol religion in words, yet, if you do it coldly, you will seem by your manner to unsay what you said in the matter. It is a kind of contempt of great things, especially of so great things, to speak of them without much affection and fervency. The manner, as well as the words, must set them forth. If we are commanded, "Whatsoever our hand findeth to do, to do it with all our might," then certainly such a work as preaching for men's salvation should be done with all our might. But, alas ! how few in number are such men ! It is only here and there, even among good ministers, that we find one who has an earnest, persuasive, powerful way of speaking, that the people can feel him preach when they hear him.

Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened, either on earth or in hell. Look around upon them with the eye of faith, and with compassion, and think in what a state of joy or torment they must all be for ever ! and then, methinks, it will make you earnest, and melt your heart to a



sense of their condition. Oh ! speak not one cold or careless word about so great a business as heaven or hell ! Whatever you do, let the people see that you are in good earnest. Truly, brethren, they are great works which have to be done, and you must not think that trifling will despatch them. You cannot break men's hearts by jesting with them, or telling them a smooth tale, or pronouncing a gaudy oration. Men will not cast away their dearest pleasures at the drowsy request of one that seemeth not to mean as he speaks, or to care much whether his request be granted or not. If you say that the work is God's, and He may do it by the weakest means, I answer, It is true, He may do so ; but yet His ordinary way is to work by means, and to make, not only the matter that is preached, but also the manner of preaching, instrumental to the work.

III. The ministerial work must be carried on *prudently and orderly*. Milk must go before strong meat ; the foundation must be laid before we attempt to raise the superstructure. Children must not be dealt with as men of full stature. Men must be brought into a state of grace, before we can expect from them the works of grace. The work of conversion, and repentance from dead works, and faith in Christ, must be first, and frequently, and thoroughly taught. We must not

ordinarily go beyond the capacities of our people, nor teach them the perfection, that have not learned the first principles of religion; for, as Gregory Nyssen saith—"We teach not infants the deep precepts of science, but first letters, and then syllables, &c. So the guides of the Church do first propound to their hearers certain documents, which are as the elements; and so by degrees do open to them the more perfect and mysterious matters."

IV. Throughout the whole course of our ministry, *we must insist chiefly upon the greatest and most necessary truths, and be more seldom and sparing upon the rest.* If we can but teach Christ to our people, we shall teach them all. Get them well to heaven, and they will have knowledge enough. The great and commonly acknowledged truths of religion are those that men must live upon, and which are the great instruments of destroying men's sins, and raising the heart to God. We must, therefore, ever have our people's necessities before our eyes. To remember the "one thing needful," will take us off needless ornaments and unprofitable controversies. Many other things are desirable to be known; but this must be known, or else our people are undone for ever. I confess I think NECESSITY should be the great disposer of a minister's course of study and labour. If we were sufficient for every thing, we might

attempt every thing, and take in order the whole Encyclopedia: but life is short, and we are dull, and eternal things are necessary, and the souls that depend on our teaching are precious. I confess necessity hath been the conductor of my studies and life. It chooseth what book I shall read, and tells me when, and how long. It chooseth my text, and makes my sermon, both for matter and manner, so far as I can keep out my own corruption. Though I know the constant expectation of death hath been a great cause of this, yet I know no reason why the most healthy man should not make sure of the most necessary things first, considering the uncertainty and shortness of all men's lives. Xenophon thought, "there was no better teacher than necessity, which teacheth all things most diligently." Who can, in studying, preaching, or labouring, be doing other matters, if he do but know that this **MUST** be done? Who can trifle or delay, that feeleth the spurs of necessity? Doubtless this is the best way to redeem time—to see that we lose not an hour—when we spend it only on *necessary things*. This is the way to be most profitable to others, though not always to be most pleasing and applauded.

Hence it is that a preacher must be often upon the same things, because the matters of necessity

are few. We must not either feign necessities, or fall much upon unnecessaries, to satisfy them that look for novelties, though we must clothe the same truths with a grateful variety in the manner of our delivery. The great volumes and tedious controversies that so much trouble us and waste our time, are usually made up more of opinions than of necessary verities. Ministers, therefore, must be observant of the case of their flocks, that they may know what is most necessary for them, both for matter and for manner; and usually the matter is first to be regarded, as being of more importance than the manner. If you are to choose what authors to read yourselves, will you not rather take those that tell you what you know not, and that speak the most necessary truths in the clearest manner, though it be in barbarous or unhandsome language, than those that will most learnedly and elegantly tell you that which is false or vain. And surely, as I do in my studies for my own edification, I should do in my teaching for other men's. It is commonly empty, ignorant men who want the matter and substance of true learning, that are curious and solicitous about words and ornaments, when the oldest, most experienced, and learned men, abound in substantial verities, delivered in the plainest dress.

V. *All our teaching must be as plain and simple*

*as possible.* This doth best suit a teacher's ends. He that would be understood, must speak to the capacity of his hearers. Truth loves the light, and is most beautiful when most naked. It is the sign of an envious enemy to hide the truth; and it is the work of a hypocrite to do this under pretence of revealing it; and, therefore, painted, obscure sermons, (like painted glass in windows which keeps out the light,) are too often the marks of painted hypocrites. If you would not teach men, what do you in the pulpit? If you would, why do you not speak so as to be understood? I know the height of the matter may make a man not understood when he hath studied to make it as plain as he can; but that a man should purposely cloud the matter, in strange words, and hide his mind from the people, whom he pretendeth to instruct, is the way to make fools admire his profound learning, and wise men his folly, pride, and hypocrisy.

VI. The ministerial work must be carried on *with great humility.* We must carry ourselves meekly and condescendingly to all; and so teach others, as to be ready to learn of any that can teach us, and so both teach and learn at once; not proudly venting our own conceits, and disdaining all that any way contradict them, as if we had attained to the height of knowledge, and were

destined to the chair, and other men to sit at our feet. Pride is a vice that ill beseems them that must lead men in such an humble way to heaven : let us, therefore, take heed lest, when we have brought others thither, the gate should prove too strait for ourselves. God, that thrust a proud angel out of heaven, will not entertain there a proud preacher. It is indeed pride that feedeth all the rest of our sins.

One of the most heinous and palpable sins is PRIDE. This is a sin that hath too much interest in the best of us ; but which is more hateful and inexcusable in us than in other men. Yet is it so prevalent in some of us, that it inditeth our discourses, it chooseth our company, it formeth our countenances, it putteth the accent and emphasis upon our words. It fills some men's minds with aspiring desires and designs ; it possesseth them with envious and bitter thoughts against those who stand in their light, or who by any means eclipse their glory, or hinder the progress of their reputation. Oh ! what a constant companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly and subtle insinuating enemy is this sin of pride ! It goes with men to the draper, the mercer, the tailor ; it chooseth them their cloth, their trimming, and their fashion. Fewer ministers would ruffle it out in the fashion in hair and habit, if it were not for



the command of this tyrant. And I would that this were all, or the worst. But, alas! how frequently doth it go with us to our study, and there sit with us and do our work? How oft doth it choose our subject, and, more frequently still, our words and ornaments. God commandeth us to be as plain as we can, that we may inform the ignorant; and as convincing and serious as we are able, that we may melt and change their hardened hearts. But pride stands by and contradicteth all, and produceth its toys and trifles. It polluteth rather than polisheth; and, under pretence of laudable ornaments, dishonoureth our sermons with childish gauds; as if a prince were to be decked in the habit of a stage-player or a painted of fool. It persuadeth us to paint the window, that it may dim the light; and to speak to our people that which they cannot understand, to show them that we are able to speak unprofitably. If we have a plain and cutting passage, it taketh off the edge, and dulls the life of our preaching, under pretence of filing off the roughness, unevenness, and superfluity. When God chargeth us to deal with men as for their lives, and to beseech them with all the earnestness that we are able, this cursed sin controlleth all, and condemneth the most holy commands of God, and saith to us, "What! will you make people think you are mad? will you make



them say you rage or rave? Cannot you speak soberly and moderately?" And thus doth pride make many a man's sermons; and what pride makes, the devil makes; and what sermons the devil will make, and to what end, we may easily conjecture. Though the matter be of God, yet if the dress, and manner, and end be from Satan, we have no great reason to expect success.

And when pride hath made the sermon, it goes with us into the pulpit—it formeth our tone—it animateth us in the delivery—it takes us off from that which may be displeasing, how necessary soever, and setteth us in pursuit of vain applause. In short, the sum of all is this, it maketh men, both in studying and preaching, to seek themselves and deny God, when they should seek God's glory and deny themselves. When they should inquire, What shall I say, and how shall I say it, to please God best, and do most good? it makes them ask, What shall I say, and how shall I deliver it, to be thought a learned, able preacher, and to be applauded by all that hear me? When the sermon is done, pride goeth home with them, and maketh them more eager to know whether they were applauded, than whether they did prevail for the saving of souls. Were it not for shame, they could find in their hearts to ask people how they liked them, and to draw out their commendations.

If they perceive that they are highly thought of, they rejoice as having attained their end; but if they see that they are considered but weak or common men, they are displeased, as having missed the prize they had in view.

Oh! that the Lord would lay us at His feet, in tears of unfeigned sorrow for this sin! Brethren, may I expostulate this case a little with my own heart and yours, that we may see the evil of our sin, and be reformed? Is not pride the sin of devils—the first-born of hell? Is it not that wherein Satan's image doth much consist? and is it to be tolerated in men who are so engaged against him and his kingdom as we are? The very design of the Gospel is to abase us; and the work of grace is begun and carried on in humiliation. Humility is not merely an ornament of a Christian; it is an essential part of the new creature. It is a contradiction in terms to be a Christian, and not humble. All who will be Christians must be Christ's disciples, and "come to him to learn;" and the lesson which he teacheth them is, to "be meek and lowly." Oh! how many precepts and admirable examples hath our Lord and Master given us to this end? Can we behold him washing and wiping his servants' feet, and yet be haughty and lordly still? Shall he converse with the meanest of the people, and shall we avoid them

as below our notice, and think none but persons of wealth and honour fit for our society? How many of us are oftener found in the houses of gentlemen than in the cottages of the poor, who most need our help? There are many of us who would think it below us, to be daily with the most needy and beggarly people, instructing them in the way of life and salvation; as if we had taken charge of the souls of the rich only! Alas! what is it that we have to be proud of? Is it of our body? Why is it not made of the same materials as the brutes; and must it not shortly be as loathsome and abominable as a carcase? Is it of our graces? Why, the more we are proud of them, the less we have to be proud of. When so much of the nature of grace consists in humility, it is a great absurdity to be proud of it. Is it of our knowledge and learning? Why, if we have any knowledge at all, we must know how much reason we have to be humble; and if we know more than others, we must know more reasons than others to be humble. How little is it that the most learned know, in comparison of that of which they are ignorant! To know that things are past your reach, and to know how ignorant you are, one would think should be no great cause of pride. However, do not the devils know more than you? And will you be proud of that in which the devils excel

you? Our very business is to teach the great lesson of humility to our people, and how unfit is it that we should be proud ourselves? We must study humility, and preach humility, and must we not possess and practise humility? A proud preacher of humility is, at least, a self-condemning man.

VII. *There must be a prudent mixture of severity and mildness both in our preaching and discipline*; each must be predominant, according to the character of the person, or matter, that we have in hand. If there be *no* severity, our reproofs will be despised. If *all* severity, we shall be taken as usurpers of dominion, rather than persuaders of the minds of men to the truth.

VIII. *We must be serious, affectionate, and zealous in every part of our work.* Our work requireth greater skill, and especially greater life and zeal than any of us bring to it. It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and to deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God, in the name of the Redeemer. It is no easy matter to speak so plainly that the most ignorant may understand us; and so seriously, that the deadeast hearts may feel us; and so convincingly, that the contradicting cavillers may be silenced. The weight of our matter condemneth coldness and sleepy dulness. We should

see that we be well awakened ourselves, and our spirits in such a plight as may make us fit to awaken others. If our words be not sharpened, and pierce not as nails, they will hardly be felt by stony hearts. To speak slightly and coldly of heavenly things, is nearly as bad as to say nothing of them at all.

IX. The whole of our ministry must be carried on *in tender love to our people*. We must let them see that nothing pleaseth us but what profiteth them; and that what doth them good, doth us good; and that nothing troubleth us more than their hurt. We must feel toward our people as a father toward his children—yea, the tenderest love of a mother must not surpass ours. We must even travail in birth till Christ be formed in them. They should see that we care for no outward thing—neither wealth, nor liberty, nor honour, nor life—in comparison with their salvation; but could even be content to have our names blotted out of the land of the living, rather than they should not be found in the Lamb's Book of Life. Thus should we, as John saith, be ready to “lay down our lives for the brethren,” and, with Paul, not count our lives dear to us, so we may but “finish our course with joy, and the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus.” When the people see that you unfeignedly love them, they will hear

anything, and bear anything from you. We ourselves will take all things well, from one that we know doth entirely love us. We will put up with a blow that is given us in love, sooner than with a foul word that is spoken to us in malice or in anger. Most men judge of the counsel, as they judge of the affection of him that gives it—at least so far as to give it a fair hearing. Oh! therefore, see that you feel a tender love to your people in your breasts, and let them perceive it in your speeches, and see it in your conduct.

Take heed, therefore, that you do not connive at the sins of your people, under pretence of love; for that were to cross the nature and end of love. Friendship must be cemented by piety. A wicked man cannot be a true friend; and if you befriend their wickedness, you show that you are wicked yourselves. Pretend not to love them, if you favour their sins, and seek not their salvation. By favouring their sins, you will show your enmity to God, and then how can you love your brother? If you be their best friends, help them against their worst enemies. And think not all sharpness inconsistent with love: parents correct their children, and God Himself “chastens every son whom he receiveth.”

X. We must carry on our work *with patience*. We must bear with many abuses and injuries from



those to whom we seek to do good. When we have studied for them, and prayed for them, and exhorted them with all earnestness and condescension, and given them what we are able, and tended them as if they had been our children, we must expect that many of them will requite us with scorn, and hatred, and contempt, and account us their enemies, because we "tell them the truth." Now we must endure all this patiently, and we must unweariedly hold on doing good, "in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth." We have to deal with distracted men, who will fly in the face of their physician, but we must not, therefore, neglect their cure. He is unworthy to be a physician who will be driven away from a frenetic patient by foul words.

XI. All our work must be managed *reverently*, *as beseemeth them that believe in the presence of God*, and use not holy things as if they were common. Reverence is that affection of the soul which proceedeth from deep apprehensions of God, and indicateth a mind that is much conversant with Him. To manifest irreverence in the things of God, is to manifest hypocrisy, and that the heart agreeth not with the tongue. I know not how it is with others, but the most reverent preacher, that



speaks as if he saw the face of God, doth more affect my heart, though with common words, than an irreverent man with the most exquisite preparations. Yea, though he bawl it out with ever so much apparent earnestness, if reverence be not answerable to fervency, it worketh but little. Of all preaching in the world, (that speaks not stark lies,) I hate that preaching which tends to make the hearers laugh, or to move their minds with tickling levity, and affect them as stage-plays used to do, instead of affecting them with a holy reverence of the name of God. We should, as it were, suppose we saw the throne of God, and the millions of glorious angels attending him, that we may be awed with His majesty, when we draw near Him in holy things, lest we profane them, and take His name in vain.

XII. All our work must be done *spiritually, as by men possessed of the Holy Ghost*. There is in some men's preaching, a spiritual strain, which spiritual hearers can discern and relish; whereas, in other men's, this sacred tincture is so wanting that, even when they speak of spiritual things, the manner is such as if they were common matters. Our evidence and illustrations of divine truth, must be spiritual, being drawn from the Holy Scriptures, rather than from the writings of men. The wisdom of the world must not be magnified

against the wisdom of God ; philosophy must be taught to stoop and serve, while faith doth bear the chief sway. Great scholars, in Aristotle's school, must take heed of glorying in their master, and despising those that are there below them, lest they themselves prove lower in the school of Christ, and "least in the kingdom of God," while they would be great in the eyes of men. As wise a man as any of them would glory in nothing but the cross of Christ, and determined to know nothing but him crucified.

Let all writers have their due esteem, but compare none of them with the Word of God. We will not refuse their service, but we must abhor them as rivals or competitors. It is the sign of a distempered heart that loseth the relish of Scripture excellency. For there is in a spiritual heart a co-naturality to the Word of God, because this is the seed which did regenerate him. The Word is that seal which made all the holy impressions that are in the hearts of true believers, and stamped the image of God upon them ; and, therefore, they must needs be like that Word, and highly esteem it as long as they live.

XIII. If you would prosper in the ministerial work, *be sure to keep up earnest desires and expectations of success.* If your hearts be not set on the end of your labours, and you long not to

see the conversion and edification of your hearers, and do not study and preach in hope, you are not likely to see much success. As it is a sign of a false, self-seeking heart, that can be content to be still doing, and yet see no fruit of his labour; so I have observed that God seldom blesseth any man's work so much as his whose heart is set upon the success of it. Let it be the property of a Judas, to have more regard to the bag than to his work, and not to care much for what they pretend to care; and to think, if they have their salaries, and the love and commendations of their people, they have enough to satisfy them; but, let all who preach for Christ and men's salvation, be unsatisfied, till they have the thing they preach for. He never had the right ends of a preacher, who is indifferent whether he obtain them, and is not grieved when he misseth them, and rejoiced when he can see the desired issue. When a man doth only study what to say, and how, with commendation, to spend the hour, and looks no more after it, unless it be to know what people think of his abilities, and thus holds on from year to year, I must needs think that this man doth preach for himself, and not for Christ, how excellently soever he may seem to do it.

No wise or charitable physician is content to be always giving physic, and to see no amendment

among his patients, but to have them all die upon his hands; nor will any wise and honest school-master be content to be still teaching, though his scholars profit not by his instructions; but both of them would rather be weary of the employment. I know that a faithful minister may have comfort when he wants success; and "though Israel be not gathered, our reward is with the Lord;" and our acceptance is not according to the fruit, but according to our labour; but then, he that longeth not for the success of his labours, can have none of this comfort, because he was not a faithful labourer. What I say is only for them that are set upon the end, and grieved if they miss it. Nor is this the full comfort that we must desire, but only such a part as may quiet us, though we miss the rest. What if God will accept a physician, though the patient die? He must, notwithstanding that, work in compassion, and long for a better issue, and be sorry if he miss it. For it is not merely our own reward that we labour for, but other men's salvation. I confess, for my part, I wonder at some ancient reverend men, that have lived twenty, thirty, or forty years with an unprofitable people, among whom they have scarcely been able to discern any fruits of their labours, how they can, with so much patience, continue among them. Were it my case, though I durst

not leave the vineyard, nor quit my calling, yet I should suspect that it was God's will I should go somewhere else, and another come in my place that might be fitter for them; and I should not be easily satisfied to spend my days in such a manner.

XIV. The ministerial work must be carried on *under a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our entire dependence upon Christ.* We must go for light, and life, and strength to Him who sends us on the work. And when we feel our own faith weak, and our hearts dull, and unsuitable to so great a work as we have to do, we must have recourse to him, and say—"Lord, wilt thou send me with such an unbelieving heart to persuade others to believe? Must I daily plead with sinners about everlasting life and everlasting death, and have no more feeling of those weighty things myself? Oh! send me not naked and unprovided to the work; but, as thou commandest me to do it, furnish me with a spirit suitable thereto." Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching; he preacheth not heartily to his people that prayeth not earnestly for them. If we prevail not with God to give them faith and repentance, we shall never prevail with them to believe and repent. When our own hearts are so far out of order, and theirs so far out of order, if

we prevail not with God to mend and help them, we are like to make but unsuccessful work.

XV. Let me conclude with one other remark—that we must be *very studious of union and communion among ourselves*, and of the unity and peace of the Churches that we oversee. We must be sensible how needful this is to the prosperity of the whole, the strengthening of our common cause, the good of the particular members of our flock, and the further enlargement of the kingdom of Christ. And, therefore, instead of quarrelling with our brethren, we must combine against the common adversaries; and all ministers must associate and hold communion, and correspondence, and constant meetings to those ends, and smaller differences of judgment are not to interrupt them. They must do as much of the work of God, in unity and concord as they can, and not to rule over one another, but to avoid misunderstandings, and consult for mutual edification, and maintain love and communion, and go on unanimously in the work that God hath already commanded us. Had the ministers of the Gospel been men of peace, and of Catholic, rather than factious spirits, the Church of Christ had not been in the case it now is.



## SECTION III.

*The Motives to this Oversight.*

HAVING considered the manner in which we are to take heed to the flock, I shall now proceed to lay before you some motives to this oversight.

1. The nature of our office requireth us to "take heed to the flock." What else are we overseers for? To be a bishop, or pastor, is not to be set up as an idol for the people to bow to; but it is to be the guide of sinners to heaven. It is a sad case that men should be of a calling of which they know not the nature, and undertake they know not what. Do these men consider what they have undertaken, that live in ease and pleasure, and have time to take their superfluous recreations, and to spend an hour or more at once in loitering, or in vain discourse, when so much work doth lie upon their hands? Brethren, do you consider what you have taken upon you? Why, you have undertaken the conduct, under Christ, of a band of his soldiers "against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places." You must lead them on to the



sharpest conflicts ; you must acquaint them with the enemies' stratagems and assaults ; you must watch yourselves, and keep them watching. If you miscarry, they and you may perish. You have a subtle enemy, and therefore you must be wise. You have a vigilant enemy, and therefore you must be vigilant. You have a malicious, and violent, and unwearied enemy, and therefore you must be resolute, courageous, and indefatigable. You are in a crowd of enemies, encompassed by them on every side, and if you heed one and not all, you will quickly fall.

And, oh, what a world of work have you to do ! Not a person that you see but may find you work. In the saints themselves, how soon do the Christian graces languish if you neglect them, and how easily are they drawn into sinful practices, to the dishonour of the Gospel, and to their own loss and sorrow ! If this be the work of a minister, you may see what a life he hath to lead. Let us, then, be up and doing, with all our might ; difficulties must quicken, not discourage us in so necessary a work. If we cannot do all, let us do what we can ; for, if we neglect it, woe to us, and to the souls committed to our care ! Should we pass over all these other duties, and, by preaching only, think to prove ourselves faithful ministers, and to put off God and man with such a shell and

vizor, our reward will prove as superficial as our work.

2. Consider that it is by your own voluntary undertaking and engagement, that all this work is laid upon you. No man forced you to be overseers of the Church. And doth not common honesty bind you to be true to your trust?

3. Consider that you have the honour to encourage you to the labour. And a great honour it is to be the ambassadors of God, and the instruments of men's conversion—to "save their souls from death, and to cover a multitude of sins." The honour, indeed, is but the attendant of the work. To do, therefore, as the prelates of the Church in all ages have done—to strive for precedency, and fill the world with contentions about the dignity and superiority of their seats, doth show that we much forget the nature of that office which we have undertaken. I seldom see ministers strive so furiously who shall go first to a poor man's cottage to teach him and his family the way to heaven; or who shall first endeavour the conversion of a sinner, or first become the servant of all! Strange, that notwithstanding all the plain expressions of Christ, men will not understand the nature of their office! If they did, would they strive who would be the pastor of a whole county and more, when there are so many thousand poor

sinner in it that cry for help, and they are neither able nor willing to engage for their relief? Nay, when they can patiently live in the house with profane persons, and not follow them seriously and incessantly for their conversion! And that they would have the name and honour of the work of a county who are unable to do all the work of a parish, when the honour is but the appendage of the work! Is it names and honour, or the work and end that they desire? Oh! if they would faithfully, humbly, and self-denyingly, lay out themselves for Christ and his Church, and never think of titles and reputation, they should then have honour whether they would or not; but by gaping after it, they lose it.

4. What an obligation, then, is laid upon us by our call to the work? It is the *Church of God* which we must oversee,—that Church for which the world is chiefly upheld—which is sanctified by the Holy Ghost—which is the mystical body of Christ,—that Church with which angels are present, and on which they attend as ministering spirits,—whose little ones have their angels beholding the face of God in heaven! Oh! what a charge is it that we have undertaken! And shall we be unfaithful to it? Have we the stewardship of God's own family, and shall we neglect it? Have we the conduct of those saints that shall live for

ever with God in glory, and shall we overlook them? God forbid! I beseech you, brethren, let this thought awaken the negligent. You that draw back from painful, displeasing, suffering duties, and put off men's souls with ineffectual formalities, do you think this is honourable treatment of Christ's spouse? Are the souls of men thought meet by God to see His face, and live for ever in heaven, and are they not worthy of your utmost cost and labour on earth? Do you think so basely of the Church of God, as if it deserved not the best of your care and help? Were you the keepers of sheep or swine, you would scarcely let them go, and say, They are not worth my looking after; especially if they were your own. And dare you say so of the souls of men—of the Church of God? Christ walketh among them; remember his presence, and see that you are diligent in your work. They are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, to show forth the praises of him that hath called them.” And will you neglect them?

5. The last motive that is mentioned in my text, is drawn from the price that was paid for the Church which we oversee, “which God,” says the apostle, “hath purchased with his own blood.” Oh! what an argument is this to quicken the negligent, and to condemn those who will not be

quicken'd to their duty by it ! What, brethren, shall we despise the blood of Christ ? Shall we think it was shed for them who are not worthy of our utmost care ? You may see here, it is not a little crime that *negligent* pastors are guilty of. As much as in them lieth, the blood of Christ would be shed in vain. They would lose him those souls which he hath so dearly purchased.

Oh ! then, let us hear those arguments of Christ, whenever we feel ourselves grow dull and careless — “ Did I die for these souls, and wilt not thou look after them ? Were they worth my blood, and are they not worth thy labour ? Did I come down from heaven to earth, ‘ to seek and to save that which was lost,’ and wilt thou not go to the next door, or street, or village, to seek them ? How small is thy labour and condescension compared to mine ? I debased myself to this, but it is thy honour to be so employed. Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation, and was I willing to make thee a fellow-worker with me, and wilt thou refuse to do that little that lieth upon thy hands ? ”

Reverend and dear brethren, our business is to humble ourselves before the Lord for our past negligence, and to implore God’s assistance in our work for the time to come. Indeed, we can scarcely expect the latter without the former. If

God will help us in our future duty, He will first humble us for our past sin.

I beseech you to take what has been said into consideration; and see whether this be not the great and lamentable sin of the ministers of the Gospel, that they give not up themselves and all that they have, to the carrying on of the blessed work which they have undertaken: and whether flesh-pleasing, and self-seeking, and an interest distinct from that of Christ, do not make us neglect much of our duty, and serve God in the cheapest and most applauded part of His work, and withdraw from that which would subject us to cost and sufferings? And whether this do not show that too many of us are earthly, that seem to be heavenly, and mind the things below, while they preach the things above, and idolize the world, while they call men to condemn it?

Brethren, can you look on your miserable people, and not perceive them calling to you for help? There is not a sinner whose case you should not so far compassionate as to be willing to relieve them. Can you see them, as the wounded man by the way, and unmercifully pass by? Can you hear them cry to you, as the man of Macedonia to Paul, in vision, "Come and help us," and yet refuse your help? Are you entrusted with the charge of an hospital, where one languisheth in one corner,



and another groaneth in another, and crieth out, "Oh, help me; pity me for the Lord's sake!" and where a third is raging mad, and would destroy himself and you, and yet will you sit idle, and refuse your help? If it may be said of him that relieveth not men's bodies, how much more of him that relieveth not men's souls, that "if he see his brother have need, and shut up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" You are not such monsters, such hard-hearted men, but you will pity a leper—you will pity the naked, the imprisoned, or the desolate—you will pity him that is tormented with grievous pain or sickness—and will you not pity an ignorant, hard-hearted sinner?—will you not pity one that must be shut out from the presence of the Lord, and lie under His remediless wrath, if thorough repentance speedily prevent it not? Oh! what a heart is it that will not pity such a one! What shall I call the heart of such a man? A heart of stone, a very rock or adamant—the heart of a tiger—or rather the heart of an infidel! for surely if he believed the misery of the impenitent, it is not possible but he should take pity on him. Can you tell men in the pulpit that they shall certainly be damned except they repent, and yet have no pity on them when you have proclaimed to them their danger?

Most of them have an ungrounded trust in Christ, hoping that he will pardon, justify, and save them, while the world hath their hearts, and they live to the flesh. And this trust they take for justifying faith. I have found by experience that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour's close discourse, than they did from ten years' public preaching. I know that preaching the Gospel publicly is the most excellent means, because we speak to many at once. But it is usually far more effectual to preach it privately to a particular sinner, as to himself.

And if you pity them, will you not do this much for their salvation? How many around you are blindly hastening to perdition, while your voice is appointed to be the means of arousing and reclaiming them! The physician hath no excuse; he is doubly bound to relieve the sick, when even every neighbour is bound to help them. Brethren, what if you heard sinners cry after you in the streets—"Oh, sir, have pity on me, and afford me your advice! I am afraid of the everlasting wrath of God! I know I must shortly leave this world, and I am afraid lest I shall be miserable in the next!"—could you deny your help to such poor sinners? What if they came to your study door,

and cried for help, and would not go away till you had told them how to escape the wrath of God?—could you find in your hearts to drive them away without advice? I am confident you could not. Why, alas! such persons are less miserable than they who will not cry for help. It is the hardened sinner who cares not for your help, that most needeth it: and he that hath not so much life as to feel that he is dead, nor so much light as to see his danger, nor so much sense left as to pity himself,—this is the man that is most to be pitied. Oh, then, for the Lord's sake, and for the sake of poor souls, have pity on them, and bestir yourselves, and spare no pains that may conduce to their salvation.

This duty is necessary to your own welfare, as well as to your people's. This is your work, according to which, among others, you shall be judged. If, therefore, you care not for others, care, at least, for yourselves. Oh, what a dreadful thing is it to answer for the neglect of such a charge? and what sin more heinous than the betraying of souls? Doth not that threatening make us tremble—"If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but HIS BLOOD WILL I REQUIRE AT THY HAND." I am afraid—nay, I have no doubt, that the day is near when unfaith-

ful ministers will wish that they had never known their charge; but that they had rather been colliers, or sweeps, or tinkers, than pastors of Christ's flock!—when, besides all the rest of their sins, they shall have the blood of so many souls to answer for. Oh, brethren, our death, as well as our people's, is at hand, and it is as terrible to an unfaithful pastor as to any! When we see that die we must, and that there is no remedy—that no wit, nor learning, nor popular applause, can avert the stroke, or delay the time; but, willing or unwilling, our souls must be gone, and that into a world which we never saw, where our persons and our worldly interest will not be respected; oh! then, for a clear conscience, that can say, “I lived not to myself, but to Christ; I spared not my pains; I hid not my talent; I concealed not men's misery, nor the way of their recovery.” Oh! sirs, let us therefore take time while we have it, and work while it is day, “for the night cometh when no man can work.”

And now, brethren, what have we to do for the time to come, but to deny our lazy flesh, and rouse up ourselves to the work before us. The harvest is great—the labourers are few—the loiterers and hinderers are many—the souls of men are precious—the misery of sinners is great—and the everlasting misery to which they are

near is greater—the joys of heaven are inconceivable—the comfort of a faithful minister is not small—the joy of extensive success will be a full reward. To be fellow-workers with God and His Spirit is no little honour; to subserve the blood-shedding of Christ for men's salvation is not a light thing. To lead on the armies of Christ through the thickest of the enemy—to guide them safely through a dangerous wilderness—to steer the vessel through such storms, and rocks, and sands, and shelves, and bring it safe to the harbour of rest, requireth no small skill and diligence. The fields now seem even white unto harvest—the preparations that have been made for us are very great—the season of working is more calm than most ages before us have ever seen. We have carelessly loitered too long already. The present time is posting away. While we are trifling, men are dying. Oh! how fast are they passing into another world! And is there nothing in all this to awaken us to our duty?—nothing to resolve us to speedy and unwearied diligence?

It would amaze a sensible man to think what matters we preach and talk of!—what it is for the soul to pass out of this flesh, and appear before a righteous God, and enter upon unchangeable joy or unchangeable torment! Oh! with what amazing thoughts do dying men apprehend these things!

How should such matters be preached and discoursed of? Oh! the gravity, the seriousness, the incessant diligence which these things require! I know not what others think of them, but for my part, I am ashamed of my stupidity, and wonder at myself that I deal not with my own and others' souls, as one that looks for the great day of the Lord—and that I can have room for almost any other thoughts or words—and that such astonishing matters do not wholly absorb my mind. I marvel how I can preach of them slightly and coldly, and how I can let men alone in their sins—and that I do not go to them, and beseech them, for the Lord's sake, to repent, however they take it, and whatever pains or trouble it should cost me! I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience smiteth me that I have been no more serious and fervent in such a case. It accuseth me, not so much for want of ornaments or elegance, nor for letting fall an unhandsome word; but it asketh me, "How couldst thou speak of life and death with such a heart? How couldst thou preach of heaven and hell in such a careless, sleepy manner? Dost thou believe what thou sayest? Art thou in earnest or in jest? How canst thou tell people that sin is such a thing, and that so much misery is upon them and before them, and be no more affected with it? Shouldst thou not weep over



such a people, and should not thy tears interrupt thy words? Shouldst not thou cry aloud, and show them their transgressions, and entreat and beseech them as for life and death?" Truly, this is the peal that conscience doth ring in my ears, and yet my drowsy soul will not be awakened! Oh, what a thing is a senseless, hardened heart! O Lord, save us from the plague of infidelity and hard-heartedness ourselves, or else how shall we be fit instruments of saving others from it? Oh, do that on our own souls which thou wouldst use us to do on the souls of others! I am even confounded to think what a difference there is between my sick-bed apprehensions, and my pulpit apprehensions of the life to come!

Oh! brethren, surely if you had conversed with death as oft as I have done, and as often received the sentence in yourselves, you would have an unquiet conscience, if not a reformed life, as to your ministerial diligence and fidelity; and you would have something within you that would frequently ask you such questions as these—"Is this all thy compassion for lost sinners? Wilt thou do no more to seek and to save them? Is there not such, and such, and such a one—oh! how many round about thee—that are yet the visible sons of death? What hast thou said to them, or done for their conversion? Shall they die and be

in hell before thou wilt speak to them one serious word to prevent it? Shall they there curse thee for ever that didst no more in time to save them?" Such cries of conscience are daily ringing in mine ears, though, the Lord knows, I have too little obeyed them. The God of mercy pardon me, and awaken me, with the rest of His servants that have been thus sinfully negligent. I confess, to my shame, that I seldom hear the bell toll for one that is dead, but conscience asketh me—"What hast thou done for the saving of that soul before it left the body? There is one more gone to judgment; what didst thou to prepare him for judgment?" and yet I have been slothful and backward to help them that survive. When you are laying a corpse in the grave, how can you but think within yourselves, "Here lieth the body, but where is the soul? and what have I done for it, before it departed? It was part of my charge, what account can I give of it?" Oh, brethren, is it a small matter to you to answer such questions as these? It may seem so now, but the hour is coming when it will not seem so. If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and will condemn us much more—even with another kind of condemnation than conscience doth. The voice of conscience is a still voice, and the sentence of conscience is a gentle sentence, in compa-

rison of the voice and the sentence of God. Alas! conscience seeth but a very little of our sin and misery in comparison of what God seeth. What mountains would these things appear to your souls which now seem molehills? What beams would these be in your eyes that now seem motes, if you did but see them in a clearer light? (I dare not say, as God seeth them.) We can easily make shift to plead the cause with conscience, and either bribe it, or bear its sentence: but God is not so easily dealt with, nor His sentence so easily borne. "Wherefore we receiving," and preaching, "a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence, and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." But because you shall not say that I affright you with bugbears, and tell you of dangers and terrors when there are none, I will here show you the certainty and sureness of that condemnation that is like to befall negligent pastors, particularly how many will be ready to rise up against us and condemn us, if we shall hereafter be wilful neglecters of this great work.

1. Our parents, that destined us to the ministry, will condemn us, and say, "Lord, we devoted them to thy service, and they made light of it, and served themselves."

2. Our masters that taught us, our tutors that

instructed us, the schools and universities where we lived, and all the years that we spent in study, will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us; for why was all this, but for the work of God?

3. Our learning, and knowledge, and ministerial gifts will condemn us; for to what end were we made partakers of these, but for the work of God?

4. Our voluntary undertaking the charge of souls will condemn us; for all men should be faithful to the trust which they have undertaken.

5. All the care of God for his Church, and all that Christ hath done and suffered for it, will rise up in judgment against us, if we be negligent and unfaithful, and condemn us, because by our neglect we destroyed them for whom Christ died.

6. All the precepts and charges of Holy Scripture, all the promises of assistance and reward, all the threatenings of punishment, will rise up against us and condemn us; for God did not speak all this in vain.

7. All the examples of the prophets and apostles, and other preachers recorded in Scripture, and all the examples of the faithful and diligent servants of Christ in these latter times, and in the places around us, will rise up in judgment and condemn us; for all these were for our imitation,

and to provoke us to a holy emulation in fidelity and ministerial diligence.

8. The Holy Bible that lies open before us, and all the books in our studies that tell us of our duty, directly or indirectly, will condemn the lazy and unprofitable servant; for we have not all these helps and furniture in vain.

9. All the sermons that we preach to persuade our people to work out their salvation with fear and trembling—to lay violent hands upon the crown of life, and take the kingdom by force—to strive to enter in at the strait gate, and so to run as to obtain, will rise up against the unfaithful, and condemn them; for if it so nearly concern them to labour for their salvation, doth it not concern us who have the charge of them, to be also violent, laborious, and unwearied in striving to help on their salvation? Is it worth their labour and patience, and is it not also worth ours?

10. All the sermons that we preach to them, to set forth the evil of sin, the danger of a natural state, the need of a Saviour, the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell, yea, and the truth of the Christian religion, will rise up in judgment against the unfaithful, and condemn them. And a sad review it will be to themselves when they shall be forced to think, “Did I tell them of such great

dangers and hopes in public, and would I do no more, in private, to help them? What! tell them daily of damnation, and yet let them run into it so easily! Tell them of such a glory, and scarcely speak a word to them personally, to help them to it! Were these such great matters with me at church, and so small matters when I came home?" Ah! this will be dreadful self-condemnation!

11. All the sermons that we have preached to persuade other men to such duties, will rise up in judgment against the unfaithful, and condemn them; for will you persuade others to that which you will not do as far as you can yourselves? When you threaten them for neglecting their duty, how much more do you threaten your own souls?

12. All the maintenance which we take for our service, if we be unfaithful, will condemn us; for who is it that will pay a servant to take his pleasure, or sit idle, or work for himself? If we have the fleece, surely it is that we may look after the flock; and, by taking the wages, we oblige ourselves to the work.

And now, brethren, the work is before you. In these personal instructions of all the flock, as well as in public preaching, doth it consist. Others have done their duty, and borne their burden, and now comes in yours. You may easily see how



great a matter lies upon your hands, and how many will be wronged by your failing of your duty, and how much will be lost by the sparing of your labour. If your labour be worth more than all your treasures, and than the souls of men, and than the blood of Christ, then sit still, and look not after the ignorant or the ungodly; follow your own pleasure or worldly business, or take your ease; displease not sinners, nor your own flesh, but let your neighbours sink or swim; and, if public preaching will not save them, let them perish. But, if the case be far otherwise, you had best look about you.

“But this course,” I can imagine that I hear some one reply, “will wholly lock us up from friendly intercourse with others, so that we must never stir from home, nor enjoy ourselves a day with our friends, for the relaxation of our minds. I reply, as for visits and civilities, if they be of greater use than our ministerial employments, you may break the Sabbath for them—you may forbear preaching for them, and you may also forbear this private work. But if it be otherwise, how dare you make them a pretence for neglecting so great a duty? Must God wait on your friends? What though they be lords, or knights, or gentlemen; must they be served before God? Or is their displeasure or censure a greater hurt to you

than God's displeasure or censure? Or dare you think, when God will question you for your neglects, to put Him off with this excuse—"Lord, I would have spent more of my time in seeking men's salvation; but such a gentleman or such a friend would have taken it ill if I had not waited on them." If you yet seek to please men, you are no longer the servants of Christ. He that dare spend his life in *flesh-pleasing* and *man-pleasing* is bolder than I am. And he that dare waste his time in compliments, doth little consider what he hath to do with it. Oh, that I could but improve my time according to my convictions of the necessity of improving it! He that hath looked death in the face as oft as I have done, I will not thank him if he value his time. I profess I wonder at those ministers who have time to spare—who can hunt, or shoot, or bowl, or use the like recreations two or three hours, yea, whole days together—that can sit an hour together in vain discourse, and spend whole days in complimentary visits, and journeys to such ends. Good Lord! what do these men think on—when so many souls around them cry for help, and death gives us no respite, and they know not how short a time their people and they may be together—when the smallest parish hath so much work that may employ all their diligence, night and day!

Brethren, I hope you are willing to be plainly dealt with. If you have no sense of the worth of souls, and of the preciousness of that blood which was shed for them, and of the glory to which they are going, and of the misery of which they are in danger, you are not Christians, and, consequently, are very unfit to be ministers. And if you have, how can you find time for needless recreations, visits, or discourses? Dare you, like idle gossips, trifle away your time, when you have such works as these to do, and so many of them? Oh, precious time! How swiftly doth it pass away! How soon will it be gone! What are the forty years of my life that are past! Were every day as long as a month, methinks it were too short for the work of a day! Have we not already lost time enough in the days of our vanity? Never do I come to a dying man that is not utterly stupid, but he better sees the worth of time! Oh, then, if they could call time back again, how loud would they call! If they could but buy it, what would they not give for it! And yet we can afford to trifle it away! yea, and to allow ourselves in this, and wilfully to cast off the greatest works of God! Oh, what a befooling thing is sin, that can thus distract men that seem so wise! Is it possible that a man of any compassion and honesty, or any concern about his ministerial duty, or any

sense of the strictness of his account, should have time to spare for idleness and vanity?

And I must tell you further, brethren, that if another might take some time for mere delight, which is not necessary, yet so cannot you; for your undertaking binds you to stricter attendance than other men are bound to. May a physician, when the plague is raging, take any more relaxation or recreation than is necessary for his life, when so many are expecting his help in a case of life and death? As his pleasure is not worth men's lives, still less is yours worth men's souls. Suppose a city were besieged, and the enemy watching, on one side, all advantages to surprise it, and on the other, seeking to fire it with grenades, which they are throwing in continually, I pray you tell me, if some men undertake, as their office, to watch the ports, and others to quench the fire that may be kindled in the houses, what time will you allow these men for recreation or relaxation, when the city is in danger, and the fire will burn on, and prevail, if they intermit their diligence? Or would you excuse one of these men, if he come off his work, and say, I am but flesh and blood, I must have some relaxation and pleasure? Surely, at the utmost, you would allow him none but what was absolutely necessary.

But it may be objected by some—"This is

an hard saying. Who can bear it? We do not think that it is required of ministers that they make drudges of themselves. If they preach diligently, and visit the sick, and perform other ministerial duties, and occasionally do good to those they converse with, we do not think that God doth require that we should thus tie ourselves to instruct every person distinctly, and to make our lives a burden and a slavery."

And do you think God doth not require you to do all the good you can? Will you stand by, and see sinners gasping under the pangs of death, and say, "God doth not require me to make myself a drudge to save them?" Is this the voice of Christian or ministerial compassion? Or is it not rather the voice of sensual laziness and diabolical cruelty? Doth God set you work to do, and will you not believe that He would have you to do it? Is this the voice of obedience, or of rebellion? It is the character of a hypocrite to make a religion to himself of the cheapest part of God's service which will stand with his fleshly ends and felicity, and to reject the rest, which is inconsistent therewith. And to the words of hypocrisy, this objection superaddeth the words of gross impiety. For what a wretched calumny is this against the most high God, to call His service a slavery and drudgery? What thoughts have such men of

their Master, their work, and their wages?—the thoughts of a believer or an infidel? Are these men like to honour God, and promote His service, that have such base thoughts of it themselves? Do these men delight in holiness, that account it a slavish work? Do they believe indeed the misery of sinners, that account it such a drudgery to be diligent to save them? Christ saith, that, “he that denieth not himself, and forsaketh not all, and taketh not up his cross, and followeth him, cannot be his disciple.” But these men count it a slavery to labour hard in his vineyard, and to deny their ease, at a time when they have all accommodations and encouragements. How far is this from forsaking all? And how can these men be fit for the ministry, who are such enemies to self-denial, and, consequently, to true Christianity? I am, therefore, forced to say, that hence arises the chief misery of the Church, THAT SO MANY ARE MADE MINISTERS BEFORE THEY ARE CHRISTIANS. If these men had seen the diligence of Christ in doing good, when he neglected his meat to talk with one woman, and when he had no time to eat bread, would they not have been of the mind of his carnal friends, who went to lay hold on him, and said, “He is beside himself.” They would have told Christ he made a drudge of himself, and God did not require all this ado. If they had seen him all



day in preaching, and all night in prayer, it seems he would have had this censure from them for his labour! I cannot but advise these men to search their own hearts, whether they unfeignedly believe that word which they preach? Do you indeed believe that such glory awaiteth those who die in the Lord, and such torment those who die unconverted? If you do, how can you think any labour too much for such weighty ends? If you do not, say so, and get you out of the vineyard, and go, with the prodigal, to keep swine, and undertake not to feed the flock of Christ.

Let us set before us the pattern in our text, and learn thence our duty. Oh, what a lesson is here before us! But how ill is it learned by those who still question whether these things be their duty! I confess, some of these words of Paul have been so often presented before my eyes, and impressed upon my conscience, that I have been much convinced by them of my duty and my neglect. And I think this one speech better deserveth a twelvemonth's study than most things that young students spend their time upon. Oh, brethren, write it on your study doors—set it in capital letters, that it may be ever before your eyes! Could we but well learn two or three lines of it, what preachers should we be!

1. Our general business—SERVING THE LORD WITH ALL HUMILITY OF MIND, AND WITH MANY TEARS.

2. Our special work—TAKE HEED TO OURSELVES, AND TO ALL THE FLOCK.

3. Our doctrine—REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD, AND FAITH TOWARD OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

4. The place and manner of teaching—I HAVE TAUGHT YOU PUBLICLY, AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE.

5. His diligence, earnestness, and affection—I CEASED NOT TO WARN EVERY ONE NIGHT AND DAY WITH TEARS. This is that which must win souls and preserve them.

6. His fidelity—I KEPT BACK NOTHING THAT WAS PROFITABLE UNTO YOU, AND HAVE NOT SHUNNED TO DECLARE UNTO YOU ALL THE COUNSEL OF GOD.

7. His disinterestedness and self-denial for the sake of the Gospel—I HAVE COVETED NO MAN'S SILVER, OR GOLD, OR APPAREL: YEA, THESE HANDS HAVE MINISTERED UNTO MY NECESSITIES, AND TO

THEM THAT WERE WITH ME, REMEMBERING THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS, HOW HE SAID, IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.

8. His patience and perseverance—NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME, NEITHER COUNT I MY LIFE DEAR UNTO ME, SO THAT I MIGHT FINISH MY COURSE WITH JOY, AND THE MINISTRY WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD JESUS.

9. His prayerfulness—I COMMEND YOU TO GOD AND TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP, AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED.

10. His purity of conscience—WHEREFORE I TAKE YOU TO RECORD THIS DAY, THAT I AM PURE FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN.

Write all this upon your hearts, and it will do yourselves and the Church more good than twenty years' study of those lower things, which, though they may get you greater applause in the world; yet, if separated from these, they will make you but as "sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal."

And now, brethren, I have done with my ad-

vice, and leave you to the practice. Though the proud may receive it with scorn, and the selfish and slothful with distaste, or even indignation, I doubt not, but God will use it, in despite of the opposition of sin and Satan, to the awakening of many of His servants to their duty ; and that His blessing will accompany the present undertaking, for the saving of many a soul, the peace of you that undertake and perform it, the exciting of His servants throughout the nation to second you, and the increase of the purity and the unity of His Churches. Amen.









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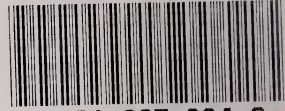
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